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By Nick Smith
ABC News

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*Ran on CBS website, SF Chronicle website, NBC website, FoxReno website

[Bay Area water conservation urged now to avoid restrictions later](#)

Wyatt Buchanan, Chronicle Staff Writer
Wednesday, April 11, 2007

[Dry winter produces concern about conserving Bay Area water](#)

Associated Press
Wednesday, April 11, 2007



Press Release

For Immediate Release
June 12, 2007

Contact:
Brad Sherwood 707. 521.6204

Regional Water Conservation Campaign Focuses on Top 10 Conservation Tips

Santa Rosa, CA – The Sonoma County Water Agency (Agency), in partnership with its water contractors, will immediately implement a regional water conservation campaign to increase awareness and educate the public on how to conserve water this summer by administering ten water conservation tips. The campaign was created due to the projection of historically low water supply levels in Lake Mendocino this fall and the request by the Agency for voluntary ten to fifteen percent reductions in water use.

The top ten water conservation tips that will be highlighted in the campaign include:

1. Reduce irrigation by 20%.
2. Find and repair leaks now.
3. Inspect and tune-up irrigation system monthly.
4. Irrigate between midnight and 6:00 a.m. to reduce water loss from evaporation and wind.
5. Use a broom, not a hose, to clean driveway, deck or patio.
6. Use a bucket and a hose with an automatic shut-off nozzle when you wash the car, or take your car to a carwash that recycles.
7. Cover pools and hot-tubs to reduce evaporation.
8. Use front-load washing machines.
9. Run the dishwasher and clothes washer with full loads only.
10. Prevent and report water waste.

The campaign will include a series of advertisements in regional and local newspapers, along with a television commercial, radio spot, movie theater advertisements, bus boards, and an internet presence. The Agency is also placing advertisements with several business and agricultural trade publications. In late April, the Agency placed a water conservation message on its billboard on Highway 101 near Todd Road. Copies of the advertisements may be viewed online at www.sonomacountywater.org under the Conservation and Lola/Wilson sections.

Participating water contractors include the City of Santa Rosa, City of Rohnert Park, Town of Windsor, City of Cotati, City of Petaluma, City of Sonoma, North Marin Water

District, Marin Municipal Water District, Valley of the Moon Water District, Forestville Water District and California American Water

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Sonoma County Water Agency provides water supply, flood protection and sanitation services for portions of Sonoma and Marin counties. Visit us at www.sonomacountywater.org.

Water officials urge continued conservation

With warmer weather arriving, need for 10-15 percent reduction in use critical, agency says

By COREY YOUNG

Petaluma ARGUS-COURIER

Two months after the Sonoma County Water Agency called for its 600,000 customers across three counties to voluntarily reduce their water consumption by at least 10 percent, officials say the real test will be when June temperatures rise and lawns and landscaping get thirsty.

Thanks to a number of factors — cool May weather and the state's OK to keep more water in reservoirs among them — water agency customers used nearly 9 percent less water in May than the preceding three years' average for that month, agency spokesman Brad Sherwood said.

Compared with the month of May three years ago, the county used 17.8 percent less water last month.

"We believe that this success is due to getting the conservation message out and people responding," Sherwood said.

But he cautioned that the battle isn't over. With the peak water-use months of July and August approaching, the need for water customers to voluntarily cut their use by 10 percent to 15 percent will be key to avoiding required cutbacks in the future, he said.

"Overall, we are seeing an increase in demand" as summer approaches, Sherwood said. Mandatory conservation "could become a reality if demand increases as temperatures soar."

The agency, which supplies water to Petaluma and most other Sonoma County cities, issued a conservation warning April 12 after water-level forecasts for its Lake Mendocino reservoir predicted drought levels by the fall.

Reduced water flows from PG&E's Potter Valley hydroelectric dam on the Eel River into the lake, combined with low rainfall this spring and required water releases into the Russian River, prompted the water agency in April to issue the conservation call.

Without the 10 percent to 15 percent reduction, Lake Mendocino — which, along with Lake Sonoma, supplies water for the agency — could be below 10,000 acre-feet capacity by October, officials said. That rivals the drought year of 1976, they said.

Sherwood said cooler May temperatures, plus the state's authorization for less Lake Mendocino water to be released into the Russian River, has helped so far. The water level in the lake stood at about 65,000 acre-feet this week, 5,000 acre-feet larger than initially expected two months ago.

"We are bucking the projections we made," he said, though "now that we're seeing the weather warm up, we're seeing the demand go up."

Figures on May water savings from the city of Petaluma weren't immediately available. The city's department of water resources and conservation, along with the county agency, is recommending steps for residents to cut back on their water use this summer.

They include:

- n Reducing irrigation by 20 percent and watering landscaping at night.
 - n Checking pipes and fixtures for water leaks.
 - n Washing cars less frequently and using car wash facilities that recycle their water.
-

n Upgrading to water-efficient toilets, washing machines and sprinkler controllers.

n Only washing full loads of laundry or dishes.

More conservation tips are available online at www.scwa.ca.gov and www.cityofpetaluma.net/wrc/waterconservation.

(Contact Corey Young at corey.young@arguscourier.com)
<http://www.petaluma360.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/AC/20070613/NEWS01/70612041/-1/PT07&template=ptart>

Water Wise

Sooner or later, it's going to pay you to get

By MEG MCCONAHEY

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT 6/09/07

It might as well be a mini-farm for all that is packed into Barbara Heiman's little half acre in east Sonoma -- including a vineyard, 30 fruit trees, perennials and an herb garden.

"Everywhere there's a space, we've got something going on it," she concedes. "It's been a real issue in terms of water."

But Heiman has just invested more than \$3,000 to deal with her thirsty landscape.

In December she replaced her old automatic sprinkler timer with a new weather-tracking smart controller that adjusts watering times and frequency based on the specific needs of her set of plants, as well as daily weather data it picks up by radio transmission.

She did that after investing another \$2,500 to improve and fine-tune her entire irrigation system to water more efficiently.

It's still too early in the season to tell if it will pay back on her water bill. But the Santa Rosa Junior College teacher is confident of one thing: "My lawn looks better than it's ever looked and my garden looks fabulous."

Heiman was one of the first homeowners in the county to take advantage of a new series of landscape incentives aimed at persuading consumers to cut down on their water use -- and waste.

Several cities, including Petaluma, Rohnert Park, and Sonoma, this month are offering rebates of 75 percent up to a maximum of \$1,100 (for a large property system) if homeowners replace their standard auto timer controllers with so-called smart controllers, designed to water more efficiently. Heiman's rebate brought her high-tech controller cost down to less than \$700. But controllers for smaller, more urban yards could be substantially less with rebates. The offer is good through June 30 but is expected to be extended, officials said.

It is one of a panoply of rebates and incentives, information and freebies available to help residents reduce their water use during a dry year when water regulators throughout the state are urging conservation in any way possible.

"Our average amount of rainfall is 30.8 inches. To date, we are only at 20.5 inches, 67 percent of average," said Brad Sherwood, a spokesman for the Sonoma County Water Agency, which is asking every household this summer to reduce its water use voluntarily by 10 to 15 percent -- or 20 percent if they're really ambitious.

Reducing river flows

Facing the potential for historically low water levels in Lake Mendocino near Ukiah, the agency last month began reducing flows into the Russian River. While Lake Sonoma is 97 percent full, another dry year could "spell disaster for the whole region," Sherwood said, from agriculture to recreation to river wildlife. "It hits everything the county is great for."

Cutting back is not just about doing the right thing. For many consumers, failing to cut back will cut deeper into the wallet. Water rates have gone up and many cities like Petaluma and Santa Rosa have tiered rate structures that penalize higher use.

Officials have been promoting indoor conservation for some time. A number of cities and water departments offer attractive rebates for replacing old toilets and washing machines with specifically approved new, high-efficiency models that have been vetted for quality.

High-efficiency toilets, which use pressure to assist in flushing or employ a dual-flush, use 20 percent less water than the now standard 1.6 gallon-per-flush toilet. Front loading washing machines, while significantly more expensive than top-loading models, also use up to 65 percent less water.

For those who lose track of time in the shower, the Water Agency is giving away free "shower coaches," a cute 5-minute sand timer in a waterproof case that suctions to the shower wall. You can also pick up free dye tablets that can be dropped in the toilet tank. If blue invades the bowl, you should replace your leaking flapper, available in most home stores.

But water regulators have concluded the biggest bang for your water buck can be achieved outdoors. According to the East Bay Municipal Utilities District, 58 percent of non-agricultural water goes into landscapes compared to 11 percent for toilets and 7 percent for showers.

In fact, you can cut back your overall home water use by 10-15 percent simply by watering 20 percent less.

Water in morning

That doesn't mean mistreating your plants. Many people overwater their yards. Or they water inefficiently. Watering early in the morning or late at night means less evaporation. Your landscape may not even notice if you lower the minutes per cycle or run your system fewer days per week. And by splitting your watering into two shorter cycles, you will reduce water runoff, particularly in heavy clay soil, resulting in a deeper watering and healthier plants.

A lot of water is squandered by leaks in the system. Many cities, including Santa Rosa, Rohnert Park, Petaluma and Windsor, will come out and audit your water use inside and out to help you save, and that includes pinpointing leaky toilets, checking the efficiency

of shower heads and faucets and checking for leaks in your outdoor irrigation system. Some cities will come out and assess your particular yard to tell you how to water more efficiently.

But there are even more dramatic incentives being dangled before ratepayers.

Santa Rosa, Sonoma and the Valley of the Moon Water District are offering cash for your grass, which is the thirstiest thing you could plant in your yard.

"It's all about behavior, and that's one of the hardest things to change," Sherwood said. "People like their nice big green lush lawn on a hillside they don't use."

The city of Santa Rosa is offering 50 cents per square foot up to 500 square feet for replacing grass with waster-wise plants, mulch or other porous materials. A typical 1,000-square-foot lawn would gulp down 20,000 gallons of water from April to October while plants appropriate to our Mediterranean climate would need just 7,000 gallons for an entire year, said Dan Muelrath, Water Conservation Coordinator for the City of Santa Rosa.

"We don't want to just promote paving," he stressed. "We want the soil to absorb the water and recharge the ground."

Santa Rosa's rebate program is comprehensive, offering up to \$350 back if consumers take a range of steps outlined for them in a free water audit. That could mean anything from replacing spray nozzles to getting a higher efficiency control box to retrofitting from a spray to a slower drip system.

One of the newest irrigation-efficiency tools on the market are smart controllers, a technology developed and manufactured by the Petaluma-based HydroPoint Data System under the name WeatherTRAK. The same device is also marketed by Toro and Irritrol and available at irrigation supply companies like Watersavers in Petaluma, Harmony Farm & Supply in Sebastopol and John Deere Landscape in Santa Rosa. ETwater in Corte Madera also sells its own smart controllers.

Petaluma, Rohnert Park and Sonoma are currently offering substantial rebates of \$300 to \$1,100 for swapping their old control boxes for one of these high-tech sensor and data boxes that take the guesswork out of watering. A typical 12-station box would cost \$500, before the 75 percent rebate.

Programmed for your specific landscape and property -- based on factors like shade, slope and the type of plants you have -- the box automatically adjusts your watering schedule using local weather data.

WeatherTRAK collects the data from 15,000 weather stations across the United States. Signaling fees are extra, averaging about \$4 a month. But 100 percent rebates are available for that cost as well.

You can reach Staff Writer Meg McConahey at 521-5204 or meg.mcconahey@pressdemocrat.com.

WATER SAVING TIPS OUTSIDE

Consult your water meter. It measures the amount of water you use and will tell you if you have a leak in your plumbing.

Sweep debris from patio, decks and paths rather than hosing down with water.

Use a bucket and a hose with an automatic shut-off nozzle when you wash your car. Or patronize a car wash that recycles its water. Better yet — proudly drive a dusty car this dry summer.

Cover your swimming pool to cut evaporation loss. Postpone non-essential repairs if they require draining and refilling the pool this year.

Inspect sprinkler and drip systems for leaks.

Water in the early morning, avoiding the heat of later day when water evaporates more quickly or it's windy. Set auto timers to water before 6 a.m. or after 9 p.m.

Defer new landscape planting until fall.

Reduce your irrigation system run times by lowering the minutes per cycle or reducing the days per week the system runs.

Water lawn in 2 short cycles rather than one long cycle, about an hour apart, to reduce runoff and provide a deeper watering that actually encourages healthier root development. This also allows the turf to go without water for longer periods.

Write down your irrigation schedule and keep it handy.

Install a drip irrigation system for shrubs, vegetable gardens, flower beds or pots for water savings of up to 50 percent outside. It's an easy, inexpensive and efficient way to water.

Apply 2 inches of mulch around the base of plants to retain moisture and prevent evaporation.

Don't spoil your plants. Too much watering may actually train them to require more irrigation than is necessary.

Don't mow too low. Keep lawns 2-3 inches high to prevent them from drying out too quickly.

INSIDE

Fix leaks promptly.

Install low-flowing showerheads and faucet aerators available free from most water providers.

When it's time to replace your washing machine, consider a front-load model. They're more expensive but use 40 percent less water. Check your water provider for potential rebates. PG&E also offers rebates of up to \$75.

Don't let the water run while shaving, brushing teeth and washing dishes.

Replace high water-use toilets with new high efficiency toilets, which use 1.28 gallons per flush or less. Check your water provider for rebates.

Run dish and clothes washers only with a full load.

Take shorter showers. Try to limit to 5 minutes.

SOURCE: Sonoma County Water Agency

GETTING HELP

Cities and water agencies with active incentives and consumer outreach programs (all offer free residential water use surveys, water-wise gardening CDs and lawn watering advice):

Sonoma County Water Agency: Comprehensive clearinghouse for water conservation, free water conservation information, free low-flow nozzles, aerators and shower heads, consumer library, links to programs and offers by participating water departments in the county. Call 547-1900 and ask to speak with a water conservation specialist. 404 Aviation Blvd., Santa Rosa. www.scwa.ca.gov.

Cotati: Free low-flow showerheads, aerators, nozzles; up to two free ultra-low-flush toilets; \$100-\$150 rebate on high-efficiency clothes washers; 523-1010, www.ci.cotati.ca.us.

Forestville: Free low-flow showerheads, aerators and hose nozzles; \$150 rebate for high-efficiency toilets. 887-1551.

Petaluma: Free low-flow showerheads, aerators, hose nozzles; \$150 rebate for high-efficiency toilet and up to \$150 for high-efficiency clothes washer; 75 percent rebate up to \$1,000 on the purchase price of a Smart, weather-adjusting irrigation controller. 778-4507, www.cityofpetaluma.net

Rohnert Park: Free low-flow showerheads, aerators and hose nozzles; \$150 rebate for high-efficiency toilet and up to \$150 for high-efficiency clothes washer; 75 percent rebate up to \$1,100 on the cost of a weather-adjusting irrigation controller. 547-1968, www.rpcity.org.

Santa Rosa: Free low-flow shower heads, aerators, self-closing hose nozzles; \$150 rebate for high-efficiency toilet and up to \$150 for high-efficiency clothes washer; Green Exchange Program offers rebates for the removal of turf and/or the installation of water-conserving irrigation hardware up to \$350. TURF-TIME offers updated watering recommendations based on data from weather stations located in Santa Rosa (available on the city Web site or voicemail hotline at 543-3466). More info: 543-3985 or www.srcity.org/wc.

Sonoma: Free low-flow showerheads, aerators, hose nozzles; \$150 rebate for high-efficiency toilet and up to \$150 for high-efficiency clothes washer; cash for grass rebate of \$50 per 100 square feet up to \$400 for replacing turf with water-wise plants or synthetic turf; 75 percent up to \$1,100 rebate for installing a qualified Smart irrigation controller with additional \$150 for drip irrigation and mulch. 933-2247, www.sonomacity.org.

Valley of the Moon Water District: Free low-flow shower heads, aerators, self-closing hose nozzles; \$150 rebate for high-efficiency toilet and up to \$150 for high-efficiency clothes washer; cash for grass rebate of \$50 per 100 square feet up to \$400 for replacing turf with water-wise plants. 996-1037, www.vomwd.com.

Windsor: Free low-flow shower heads, aerators, self-closing hose nozzles; \$150 rebate for high-efficiency toilet; \$75 rebate for low-water-use clothes washer. 838-1004, www.townofwindsor.com.

<http://www1.pressdemocrat.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070609/NEWS04/706090308&SearchID=73283830796178>

A lush, green lawn is going to cost you; Cities turning to tiered rates to curb water use this summer

By Paul Payne, staff writer

Santa Rosa Press Democrat – 6/3/07

Leonard and Sarah Sjosten like to keep their lawn green, their pool full and their ornamental fountains bubbling.

And come summer -- when water use typically doubles -- the Petaluma retirees will pay for the privilege.

Petaluma, like almost every other city in Sonoma County, charges for water according to a tiered rate system that rewards those who conserve with lower rates and penalizes those who don't.

With their consumption expected to climb into the third of four tiers by late summer, the Sjostens are looking at an increase over their spring water bill of \$50 to about \$80 bimonthly.

"When you have a pool and a lawn, it can get expensive," said Leonard Sjosten, who has lived in the picturesque two-story home near downtown since 1966. "After all, you want to keep your grass somewhat green."

Rising water rates and warm weather this summer are conspiring against lush suburban landscaping, forcing people to choose between dead greenery and shriveled pocket books.

Many cities, including Petaluma and Santa Rosa, increased rates even before this winter's slim rainfall total, concerned that growing long-term demand could outstrip Sonoma County's water supply system.

As spring moves into summer, bills across Sonoma County that already include hefty sewage charges are going up to reflect increased outdoor water use.

In response, homeowners are trying to cut back. Sprinklers come on less frequently or at night. Lawns, which consume the most water, are being replaced by drought-tolerant displays of native plants and cactus.

Beverly Davies, an eastside Petaluma resident, said her summer water bill decreased dramatically when she swapped her old lawn and traditional landscaping for a false creek made of fieldstone and less-thirsty plants.

"I don't miss it at all," said Davies, a retired accountant and member of the Petaluma Garden Club. "Before we had birch trees, sunburst locust, junipers and a lawn. That was it. It was green, green, green. Now we have an array of color."

Other people are simply coughing up the cash to maintain what they have.

Karl Schottstaedt, who lives in Petaluma's Victoria subdivision, said he loves his modestly sized front lawn, rose bushes and other perennials too much to let them go. He runs a drip system about four days a week and probably will increase that to every day come August.

"I don't like it, but I'm not going to cut back," said Schottstaedt, a landscape contractor. "Plants are everything."

And not all drought-tolerant species are attractive, Schottstaedt said.

"I like cut flowers," Schottstaedt said. "I like things that are going to give you more color. And I'm willing to pay for it."

Irrigation starts sooner

Water conservation is key in Sonoma County, officials said, especially in drier-than-normal years like this one. Rainfall has been about a third below average, leaving parched soil and causing people to irrigate sooner and in greater quantities.

"We even had some irrigation going on in January," said Santa Rosa's deputy director of water resources, Glen Wright.

But rates were rising long before the dry winter brought on conservation calls. Petaluma council members even discussed a building moratorium because of projected shortages.

Although the increases were adopted several months ago, the impact will begin to be felt this summer as people start irrigating lawns.

In January, Santa Rosa instituted a new tiered billing system that included an across-the-board hike of 9 percent. Petaluma has added a tier to an existing system and adopted increases that will penalize the largest residential water users.

"It's very effective," said Dave Iribarne, Petaluma's water conservation coordinator. "The main reason for the tiered structure is to penalize those who are wasting water."

A Petaluma citizens group is challenging the new rates, filing signatures on an initiative that could force a citywide vote by 2008. The City Council is tentatively scheduled to review the matter June 18.

Summer use swells

Countywide, the average summer water use for a single-family home is 13,000 gallons a month, a nearly threefold increase from the average 5,000 gallons a month used in winter.

Of that difference of 8,000 gallons a month, about 5,000 gallons will go to lawns alone.

"In the residential realm of landscaping, turf is the highest water user," Iribarne said.

Summer irrigation will have different prices in different cities.

The cost depends on how cities structure their rates, whether there are base fees and whether the rates have tiers of prices that penalize homeowners the more water they use.

Petaluma has a fixed bimonthly fee of \$8.94 and a four-tier residential water rate structure, with summer irrigation taking homeowners typically into the second tier.

For example, a Petaluma resident using 5,000 gallons during the winter pays \$16.17, but at 13,000 gallons, the bill climbs to \$41.58.

3-tier system in SR

Santa Rosa has a fixed charge of \$6.03 a month and a three-tier rate system, but the second tier doesn't kick in until a homeowner uses more than what would be expected during the summer.

The city sets a winter base for water usage, which averages 5,000 gallons for a single-family home.

After that 5,000 gallons, the cost of the next 8,000 gallons, which is what is expected to be used for landscaping, also is under the first tier.

In the winter, that would translate to a monthly bill of \$22.13; in the summer, \$47.89.

If the homeowner goes above that combined 13,000 gallons, the per-gallon rate goes up 25 percent for Tier 2 and an additional 50 percent for Tier 3.

Rohnert Park has a flat fee of \$16.50 and charges \$2.70 per 1,000 gallons, but to encourage conservation, the rate drops to \$2.43 per 1,000 gallons for residents who use less than 10,000 gallons a month.

But higher rates aren't the only water-saving solutions offered by cities. Many, like Santa Rosa and Petaluma, offer free irrigation system inspections.

In May, Santa Rosa unveiled a cash-for-grass program in which the city will pay people 50 cents a square foot up to 500 square feet to remove lawns and install drought-tolerant material, said Dan Muelrath, water conservation program coordinator.

Santa Rosa also offers rebates of up to \$350 for installing more efficient irrigation control hardware, Muelrath said.

Rohnert Park offers a rebate program for people who use water-efficient systems.

Lawns no more?

The future of the suburban lawn, however, is in question.

Iribarne said Petaluma is drafting a landscape ordinance that would restrict the installation of lawns in new construction to areas with functional or recreational use.

Since front lawns are mostly for show, he said, developers would have to explain any future designs that include them.

Twenty to 30 years from now, Iribarne said, front lawns could be a rarity.

"I think the way of the future is a greener-type sustainable landscaping," Iribarne said.

Meanwhile, Sjosten, whose 92-year-old home sports a wide front lawn, said water rates have been creeping up.

Last year, he said he paid \$2.16 per 748-gallon unit and this year he's paying \$2.31 per unit.

Sjosten typically holds to the first tier. But this spring he slipped into Tier 2, which has a rate of \$2.61 per unit. He expects he could go into Tier 3, at \$3 a unit, by September.

He's careful about his water use but with landscaping, a pool, two fountains and a hot tub, a basic existence might prove expensive, he said.

"I'm keeping an eye on it," Sjosten said. #

<http://www1.pressdemocrat.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070603/NEWS/706030334/1033/NEWS01>

Leaking money; Now's the time to rethink having that large, lush lawn
Editorial
Santa Rosa Press Democrat

The message included in this month's water bill -- the one on the bottom line -- should be clear to most. Sonoma County families will have to pay to play on that large green lawn in the yard.

Drought conditions combined with ongoing local efforts to reduce water consumption will make it a long, expensive summer for those who refuse to adjust their irrigation patterns.

As Staff Writer Paul Payne reported on Sunday, Santa Rosa, Petaluma and Rohnert Park have all adopted tiered water rates that will severely penalize those who are using an excessive amount of water.

For example, a Petaluma resident using 13,000 gallons this summer will pay \$41.58 a month, up from around \$16 for using 5,000 gallons during the winter.

In Santa Rosa, the bill for similar usage would be \$22.13 in the winter and \$47.89 in the summer. But if that same homeowner exceeds the 13,000 gallons, the per-gallon rate would jump by a whopping 25 percent.

This kind of pricing makes sense even in non-drought years. To do anything less during a year when the region has had 60 percent of its normal rainfall would be irresponsible.

Those considering replacing their lush lawns with drought-resistant plants may find the financial motivation they've been waiting for. #

<http://www1.pressdemocrat.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070605/NEWS/706050320/1043/OPINION01>

Going with the flow

Despite reduced water releases, it's business as usual on the Russian River

By CLARK MASON

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

“We are officially open and have plenty of water.”

That’s the greeting on the answering machine for River’s Edge Kayak and Canoe Trips in Healdsburg, one of the businesses that stands to lose the most as the Russian River recedes this summer.

The well-publicized reductions in river flow that began last month caused initial jitters, but canoe and kayak operators now say they anticipate enough water for the duration of the summer season.

That translates to generally good news from Asti, just south of Cloverdale, to Jenner by the sea, the stretch of the Russian River that gets the most recreational use.

Canoers, inner tubers, swimmers and bathers aren’t being left high and dry — at least yet.

“Currently, I’m still fairly optimistic that we’re going to have enough water to get our boats down the river with very little dragging this summer,” said Larry Laba, owner of Russian River Adventures in Healdsburg, which rents out inflatable canoes.

And temporary dams are going in as usual this week at Healdsburg’s Memorial Beach and at Johnson’s Beach in Guerneville, creating popular swimming and bathing lagoons that have attracted generations of families to the Russian River.

In early May, Sonoma County Water officials began curtailing water out of Lake Mendocino near Ukiah so that water customers would have enough this summer and endangered salmon would have a healthy river for spawning in the fall.

It stirred anxieties among those who depend the most on the river, including some tourist-oriented businesses.

There were similar fears in 2002 and 2004 that low-river flows would discourage visits from patrons of restaurants and bars, inns and special events.

But Sonoma County officials said there was still sufficient water for recreation. So far this year, that also appears to be the case.

“It’s not impacting us that much,” said Lollie Mercer, owner of River’s Edge kayaking. “I’m not concerned.”

She also acknowledged things could get a bit dicier later in the summer because water quality officials are leaving open the possibility they might further restrict Russian River flows.

In May, the state permitted a cut in the flow along the river upstream from Healdsburg from 185 cubic feet per second to 75. The flow as measured downstream from Healdsburg, where water released from Lake Sonoma into Dry Creek enters the river, was cut from 125 cubic feet per second to 85.

Water quality officials said the lower flow limits will be reached within a couple weeks.

“If we don’t see lake levels in Lake Mendocino responding the way we’re hoping, we may be back at the state board asking for further reductions,” said Chris Murray, chief of water resources planning for the Sonoma County Water Agency.

Linda Burke, owner of Burke’s Russian River Canoe Trips in Forestville, believes that before flows are restricted further, there should be mandatory conservation measures for urban users who draw water from the Russian River.

“Why just let the river bear the whole consequences of this situation? We need to encourage water conservation so there’s more water to go around,” she said.

She described the river as “jewel” with its heron, osprey, turtles, redwoods, as well as the good swimming and boating.

“We need to work together to protect and preserve it. It deserves a lot of respect,” she said.

Burke is optimistic recreational activities will not suffer and “should be OK in the long run.”

Mercer said her canoes only need six inches of water. But if needed, she would run another section of the river downstream of Healdsburg that has more water.

“We will run down to Forestville, out to Jenner if we need to. We’re going to follow the water this year.”

Mercer, who claims to have the largest kayak and canoe flotilla in the state with 500 watercraft, said she did a record business on Memorial Day weekend, despite the low flows that began two weeks before.

She acknowledges there are more shallow spots on the Russian River section her customers use above Healdsburg, but it’s still a deep channel for smooth running.

“Our clients are not complaining. When you’re doing an 11-mile or 5-mile stretch of the river, getting out once or twice is never a concern. That’s part of river running,” she said.

Laba said he is fortunate because the stretch of river from Healdsburg to Forestville that he's used for the past seven years has Dry Creek pouring into it.

Still he sees a difference between this year and others.

"It's getting thin in a couple places, quite honestly," Laba said. "Someone paddling our inflatable canoes who doesn't know where to go may run aground, whereas in years past, they wouldn't have."

The organizers of the Vineman triathlons said they've been getting a few calls weekly from participants and others curious as to whether the lower water will affect the contests scheduled in July and August.

Johnson's Beach is the venue for the swimming part of the triathlons, which draw thousands of participants.

The events will indeed go on, according to Dave Latourette, a Vineman spokesman.

"We've never had any impact from reduced flow," he said. "We've always been able to have the swim in the river, because it's dammed up at Johnson's Beach."

Linda Wilson, whose family owns Johnson's Beach and Resort, said Guerneville is fortunate because the summer dam raises the water level there.

"The main problem I feel at this point is weather. If you have good weather, people come out. If you have a foggy day, people don't rent a canoe, kayak or go swimming. We're looking forward to a good season," she said.

Steve Jackson, owner of King's Sport and Tackle Shop in Guerneville, said when the water agency reduced flows in the past "most people didn't even notice. We noticed because some kayakers were complaining the river was really low in a couple spots. But they were getting through."

"I'm not worried about this year at all," he said. "I'm worried if there's another lower water year, then we'll be in trouble."

You can reach Staff Writer Clark Mason at 521-5214 or

clark.mason@pressdemocrat.com

<http://www1.pressdemocrat.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070610/NEWS/70610010&SearchID=73283830430763>

Dry Year Reduces Russian River Flows

California Farmer

5/22/07

Because of the unusually low rainfall in the watershed and at the request of the local water agency, the State Water Resources Control Board's Division of Water Rights has approved a request to reduce the flow of water in the Russian River. It has also scheduled a June 5 workshop so that residents and interest groups can give Water Board members their feedback on this issue.

The reduced flow will reserve additional water in Lake Mendocino later into the year to enable residents to make it through the dry summer and to conserve water for endangered fish. The National Marine Fisheries Service and the California Department of Fish and Game concur that this action is needed to help protect the Russian River fishery. Environmental groups also support this year's lower flow limits. It is expected that there will be minimal impact on river recreation.

Specifically, the order states:

"Instream flow requirements for the Upper Russian River (from its confluence with the East Fork of the Russian River to its confluence with Dry Creek) be reduced from 185 cubic feet per second (cfs) to 75 cfs. The requirements for the lower Russian River (downstream of its confluence with Dry Creek) be reduced from 125 cfs to 85 cfs." Reductions will begin now and the lower flows will be in place by June 1.

The Sonoma County Water Agency petition, in effect, requests that minimum flows for the Russian River be established based on dry-year criteria rather than normal-year criteria as defined in State Water Board Decision 1610.

The request is made to prevent storage levels in Lake Mendocino from dropping to very low levels by the end of summer. The order continues, "SCWA states such low levels could: (1) severely impact threatened or endangered Russian River fish species, (2) create serious water supply impacts in Mendocino County and in Sonoma County's Alexander Valley, and (3) harm Lake Mendocino and Russian River recreation."

Combined with other water conservation efforts already in place, SCWA believes this order will allow it to get through the dry summer. The State Water Board's Division of Water Rights will accept public comment, continue to monitor the situation in the Russian River watershed and may take additional action as the summer progresses.

In response to water shortages, other government agencies are also taking steps to ensure quality water supply including an announcement yesterday of \$200 million in state grants to local agencies for conservation projects.

The workshop to accept comments is scheduled for June 5, 2007 more information is at www.waterrights.ca.gov/notices The Division of Water Rights has established a hotline for comments and questions at (916) 341-5426.

<http://californiafarmer.com/index.aspx?ascxid=fpStory&fpsid=28423&fpstid=2>

Redwood Valley fears critical water shortage
By Katie Mintz, staff writer
Ukiah Daily Journal

From Mendocino to Marin County, people who rely on the Russian River for water are fearing a summer shortage, but for one local water district the issue hits especially close to home.

The Redwood Valley County Water District, the only agency that gets its water directly from that lake that feeds the river, projects that without conservation and a little luck, by August it may no longer be able to provide water to the approximate 3,500 residents of Redwood Valley or the 4,000 acres of grapes grown there.

"We'll suffer first and worst because we have the only intake that's directly out of the Lake Mendocino," Bill Koehler, general manager of the Redwood Valley County Water District, said.

Levels in Lake Mendocino have been a concern since Pacific Gas and Electric Company announced early this winter that it would have to reduce the flow through the Potter Valley Project, which diverts water from the Eel River into the lake, to comply with its federal license.

Currently, the lake is holding approximately 65,000 acre-feet of water -- about 20,000 acre-feet less than it would have been had the Potter Valley Project flow not been reduced -- and Koehler said the outlook is not great.

"If everything goes right, we're going to worry a lot," Koehler said. "If anything goes wrong, we're out of water."

He estimates that if storage gets down to 24,000 acre-feet, the district's pump station on the western shore of Lake Mendocino won't be able to draw water, and any number of factors, such as a bad fire season or heavy evaporation, could push the lake to that level.

At present, the RVCWD is asking for immediate voluntary conservation of 10-15 percent from its customers to keep water in the lake. To help the effort, the district will soon distribute 1,500 water conservation kits that'll include low-flow shower heads and faucet diffusers, as well as other water-saving measures, to its customers free of charge.

Many other water agencies along the Russian River are asking for voluntary conservation as well, including the Sonoma County Water Agency, which is charged with managing the release of water from the lake through the Coyote Valley Dam. Just last week, the SCWA was granted permission from the State Water Resources Control Board to temporarily reduce in-stream flows in the river, meaning less will have to be released from the lake to meet flow requirements, especially if people conserve.

Before cut-back was authorized, the SCWA had predicted that storage in Lake Mendocino will decline to about 14,000 acre-feet at the beginning of fall and to 8,000 acre-feet by the end of the fall without conservation.

"It's going to take some real cooperative planning and implementing all the way down the line in order to make things work," John Growth, director of the RVCWD, said.

If voluntary conservation does not work, the RVCWD will be prepared to take action. On Thursday evening, at its regularly scheduled board meeting, the district will discuss with its constituents provisions for an ordinance that would make conservation mandatory should the need arise.

"We can conceive of, as the lake falls, increasing the level of conservation, making it mandatory," Koehler said. "At some point, if the lake falls low enough, we're going to start with a tiered structure of who gets cut off completely."

The challenge, he said, will be working to balance the needs of all customers.

"The only way we can get through this is to share the pain," Koehler said. "We can't place the burden entirely on any one class or customer."

Because Lake Mendocino is meant for flood-control rather than storage, however, water supply has never been a guarantee.

Every winter, until April 15, water must be incrementally released from the lake to prevent flooding.

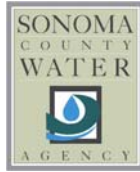
Though Koehler said the lake contains more than enough water for the district in the wetter, winter months, since 1988, the RVCWD has had a moratorium on providing new water hook-ups because of a court ruling that found the lake was not a reliable water source.

In this way, Donald Butow, chairman of the RVCWD Board of Directors, said the looming water shortage might do some good.

"In one respect, this is really a blessing," Butow said. "Over the last 20 years, 30 years, even 50 years, the (Mendocino County) Board of Supervisors has never really worried about a water situation or storage because we have the lake. Now, all of the sudden, it's come to the forefront that we don't have a storage area and we better start looking."

For more information about Redwood Valley County Water District and conservation, visit the district's Web site, www.rvcwd.org. #

http://www.ukiahdailyjournal.com/local/ci_5900822



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

707.521.6204

May 10, 2007

707.521.6208

Contacts: Brad Sherwood,

Tim Anderson,

State Water Board Grants Reduced Flows, Action Intended to Secure Water Supply for Salmon

(Santa Rosa, CA) —The Sonoma County Water Agency (Water Agency) announced today that the State Water Resources Control Board (State Board) approved its urgent request to reduce minimum water flow rates in the Russian River this year due to low water storage levels in Lake Mendocino. As of 8 a.m. this morning Water Agency staff began taking actions necessary to implement the reduced river flow rates authorized by the State Board. Flow reductions will be phased in over a period of about three weeks starting immediately.

Water officials in the Sonoma County region are also urging residents, businesses and farmers to take voluntary actions to reduce Russian River water use by 10 to 15% over the summer months. Effective voluntary conservation efforts will further assure adequate supplies for salmon are available and may help avoid the need for more stringent conservation measures later in the year.

“Now is a good time for all of us to consider our water use and look for ways to conserve water now and throughout the year.” said Paul Kelley, Sonoma County Supervisor. “It is critical to save water now so that supplies will be adequate for a thriving salmon run and for urban, agricultural, and recreational needs later in the year.” Kelley added.

The State Board approved reductions in the minimum instream flow required upstream from Healdsburg from 185 cubic feet per second (cfs) to 75 cfs. Required flow downstream of Healdsburg was reduced from 125 cfs to 85 cfs. Water Agency actions will adjust water releases from Lake Mendocino as appropriate to maintain flow rates in the upper Russian River upstream from the City of Healdsburg at rates above 125 cfs through May and 75 cfs after June 1. The flow rates in the lower river near the town of Guerneville will be managed to achieve flows above 85 cfs. The reduced flow rates are comparable to minimum flows normally implemented under dry year conditions in the Russian River watershed.

The Water Agency submitted an urgent request to reduce flow rates to the State Board on April 26th based on projections indicating critically low water levels in Lake Mendocino this fall at the time of the annual chinook salmon migration. Water Agency engineers projected that water levels in Lake Mendocino would drop to levels lower than 10,000 acre-feet which would be the lowest levels recorded since the lake was first opened in 1959. The reduced flow rates allow the Water Agency to retain additional water in storage in Lake Mendocino and improve the likelihood that adequate water supply will be available in the fall to provide for up to 4,500 chinook salmon expected to return to the river to breed.

The Water Agency is the local sponsor for the federal water projects at Lake Mendocino and Lake Sonoma and has authority to regulate water supply-related releases from these reservoirs to meet the needs of more than 600,000 people in Sonoma and Marin counties. A decision by the State Board in 1986 requires the Agency to release sufficient water from the reservoirs to maintain flows rates above designated minimum values at certain points along the Russian River. This week's action by the State Board allows the Water Agency to implement river flow rates below the rates normally required under current rainfall conditions.

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Press Release

For Immediate Release
April 24, 2007

Contact:
Brad Sherwood 707. 521.6204

Agency Receives Authorization to File Petition for Temporary Urgency Changes in Russian River Flows

Public hearing set for May 15 to discuss long-term changes to State Water Board Decision 1610

Santa Rosa, CA – The Sonoma County Water Agency (Agency) Board of Directors on Tuesday, April 24 authorized the Agency to file a Petition for Temporary Urgency Change in the Agency's water right permits with the State Water Resources Control Board (State Board). The request will seek lower minimum instream flow requirements in the Russian River to conserve water in Lake Mendocino. The Agency was also directed to take actions to encourage and increase water conservation efforts. The Petition will be filed with the State Board by Friday, April 27.

The Agency will hold three public meetings to educate the public about the Petition for Temporary Urgency Change. Agency staff will also share updated Lake Mendocino water supply projections and provide an array of water conservation materials. Below are the dates and times of the public meetings:

May 1 – Ukiah City Hall, 300 Seminary Avenue, Ukiah, CA

May 2 – Healdsburg City Hall, 401 Grove Street, Healdsburg, CA

May 3 – Guerneville Veterans Memorial Hall, First and Church Streets, Guerneville, CA

All three meetings will begin at 7p.m and conclude at 9p.m. For more information about these meetings see the public notice on the Agency's website (www.sonomacountywater.org).

On May 15 the Agency's Board of Directors will hold a public hearing to discuss the Agency's request to begin the process of making long-term changes to State Board Decision 1610. The agenda will be made available on the Agency's website.

The Agency's Board of Directors also directed the Agency to request and encourage all users of water from the Russian River and its tributaries in Mendocino, Sonoma and Marin counties, including the Agency's water contractors and their customers, agricultural irrigators, municipal diverters and their customers, to implement water conservation measures to reduce the amount of water diverted from the Russian River and its tributaries.

"Conservation is tantamount to preservation of water resources for the future. Making the right decisions today will be significant for Sonoma County and the habitat for Chinook salmon," said Agency Board of Director and Chairwoman Valerie Brown.

To increase public awareness about how to conserve water, the Agency Board of Directors also requested that the Agency implement public outreach and media programs to encourage water conservation by individuals, businesses, and the agricultural community.

Background:

Conditions in the current water year are even less favorable than conditions in water years 2004 and 2002, when Lake Mendocino storage levels declined to extremely low levels. Unless some action is taken (and assuming no large late-season storms occur), the Agency predicts that storage in Lake Mendocino will decline to about 14,000 acre-feet at the beginning of the fall Chinook migration, and to 8,000 acre-feet by the end of the fall. This situation is due both to the lack of precipitation during the recent winter storm season, and to unexpectedly lower inflows from the Potter Valley Project, because of PG&E's new FERC license.

"The Agency is taking a proactive role in making sure there is enough water in the Russian River when Chinook salmon begin migrating this fall," said Pam Jeane, deputy chief engineer of operations. "Our goal is to have 30,000 acre-feet of storage in Lake Mendocino at the beginning of the fall Chinook migration season."

To meet the storage goal, the Agency's projections indicate that an additional 16,000 acre-feet must be saved from storage releases during the spring and summer. To reach this level of savings, it is imperative that releases from Lake Mendocino that would be made to achieve minimum instream flows pursuant to State Water Resources Control Board (State Board) Decision 1610 be reduced as soon as possible.

"The Agency has discussed these fishery risks with representatives of the National Marine Fisheries Service and the California Department of Fish and Game and expects to receive letters from these agencies supporting a petition to the State Water Resources Control Board to reduce these release requirements," said Jeane. The Agency also met with staff from the State Board on April 18 to discuss the proposed Petition.

The projected fall storage level in Lake Mendocino would be inadequate to support the fall upstream migration of Chinook salmon, which are listed as a threatened species under the federal Endangered Species Act. If fall storage in Lake Mendocino were to drop to 14,000 acre-feet at the beginning of the Chinook salmon migration, this volume of water would be too low, and the temperature of the water too high, to support the migration and subsequent spawning. As a result, there is a risk that migrating Chinook salmon in the Russian River could die in the fall unless action is taken now to maintain fall storage in Lake Mendocino.

Currently, the Agency's water right permits require the Agency to release water from Lake Mendocino to meet the 185 cubic feet per second (cfs) instream flow requirement at the confluence of the West Fork and the East Fork of the Russian River, even though the Russian River is still gaining water from accretion flows. As a result of these accretions, flows are about 240 cfs at Hopland, 400 cfs at Healdsburg, and 500 cfs at Guerneville, even though the Agency's water rights permits currently only require minimum flows of 185 cfs at Hopland and Healdsburg, and 125 cfs at Guerneville. The Agency is thus currently required by its existing water right permits to draw down storage from Lake Mendocino for no recreational, fishery, or water supply purpose. Were the Agency able to meet its instream flow requirements at Hopland rather than at the confluence of the East and West Forks, the result would be an additional 3,600 acre-feet of fall storage, even if no other action were taken. Later in the spring and summer, these

accretions will decrease and ultimately disappear. Prompt action is thus necessary to accomplish these savings.

In order to meet the target minimum fall storage level of 30,000 acre-feet in Lake Mendocino, additional reductions in the applicable instream-flow requirements are necessary. **To reach this fall storage target, the Agency recommends that the Petition ask the State Board to reduce the required instream flows to 75 cfs between the East Fork/West Fork confluence and the Dry Creek, Russian River confluence and to 85 cfs downstream of the Dry Creek confluence.** These reduced minimum flow requirements would provide the Agency with sufficient flexibility to balance releases from both Lake Mendocino and Lake Sonoma to meet peak water supply demands, while maintaining much of the fishery and recreational benefits that the river provides. If the State Board did not act, minimum flow requirements are projected to be 75 cfs between the East Fork/West Fork confluence and the Dry Creek/Russian River confluence starting June 1, and 125 cfs downstream of the Dry Creek confluence, and Lake Mendocino storage would continue to drop dramatically. The proposed changes would be requested for this year only.

In 2004, the State Board granted the Agency's petition to reduce the minimum instream flow requirements on a temporary basis to those applicable in a "dry" year (75 cfs in the upper Russian River, and 85 cfs at Guerneville). The resulting reduced flows did not result in any significant reduction in recreational values or fisheries during that spring and summer, and allowed for higher Lake Mendocino storage and resulting fisheries protection during the fall. In addition, staff from the Agency and the United States Geological Survey (USGS) conducted extensive water quality testing during the 2004 lower flow conditions. Those tests did not identify any significant impacts to water quality resulting from the reductions in flow. The USGS report presenting these data can be found on the internet at <http://pubs.usgs.gov/ds/ds168/>. Filing the Temporary Urgency Petition would be exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act under State CEQA Guidelines Section 15307 (Actions Taken by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of Natural Resources), Section 15308 (Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment) and Section 15301(i) (Operations of Existing Facilities).

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Sonoma County Water Agency provides water supply, flood protection and sanitation services for portions of Sonoma and Marin counties. Visit us at www.sonomacountywater.org.



Press Release

For Immediate Release
April 20, 2007

Contact:
Brad Sherwood 707. 521.6204

Urgent Changes in Russian River Flows Sought to Protect Threatened Chinook Salmon

Fishery protection measures would include increased water conservation efforts, a series of public meetings on long-term Russian River flow changes

Santa Rosa, CA – In response to its projection of dangerously low water supply levels in Lake Mendocino this fall, the Sonoma County Water Agency (Agency) Board of Directors on Tuesday, April 24 will consider approving a resolution authorizing the Agency to file a Petition for Temporary Urgency Change in the Agency's water right permits with the State Water Resources Control Board (State Board). The request would seek lower minimum flows in the Russian River, along with taking actions to encourage and increase water conservation efforts and developing a proposal for changes to the Decision 1610 flow regime.

Conditions in the current water year are even less favorable than conditions in water years 2004 and 2002, when Lake Mendocino storage levels declined to extremely low levels. Unless some action is taken (and assuming no large late-season storms occur), the Agency predicts that storage in Lake Mendocino will decline to about 14,000 acre-feet at the beginning of the fall Chinook migration, and to 8,000 acre-feet by the end of the fall. This situation is due both to the lack of precipitation during the recent winter storm season, and to unexpectedly lower inflows from the Potter Valley Project, because of PG&E's new FERC license.

"The Agency is seeking direction from its Board of Directors to take a proactive role in making sure there is enough water in the Russian River when Chinook salmon begin migrating this fall," said Pam Jeane, deputy chief engineer of operations. "Our goal is to have 30,000 acre-feet of storage in Lake Mendocino at the beginning of the fall Chinook migration season."

To meet the storage goal, the Agency's projections indicate that an additional 16,000 acre-feet must be saved from storage releases during the spring and summer. To reach this level of savings, it is imperative that releases from Lake Mendocino that would be made to achieve minimum instream flows pursuant to State Water Resources Control Board (State Board) Decision 1610 be reduced as soon as possible.

"The Agency has discussed these fishery risks with representatives of the National Marine Fisheries Service and the California Department of Fish and Game and expects to receive letters from these agencies supporting a petition to the State Water Resources Control Board to reduce these release requirements," said Jeane. The Agency also met with staff from the State Board on April 18 to discuss the proposed Petition.

The projected fall storage level in Lake Mendocino would be inadequate to support the fall upstream migration of Chinook salmon, which are listed as a threatened species under the federal Endangered Species Act. If fall storage in Lake Mendocino were to drop to 14,000 acre-feet at the beginning of the Chinook salmon migration, this volume of water would be too low, and the temperature of the water too high, to support the migration and subsequent spawning. As a result, there is a risk that migrating Chinook salmon in the Russian River could die in the fall unless action is taken now to maintain fall storage in Lake Mendocino.

Currently, the Agency's water right permits require the Agency to release water from Lake Mendocino to meet the 185 cubic feet per second (cfs) instream flow requirement at the confluence of the West Fork and the East Fork of the Russian River, even though the Russian River is still gaining water from accretion flows. As a result of these accretions, flows are about 240 cfs at Hopland, 400 cfs at Healdsburg, and 500 cfs at Guerneville, even though the Agency's water rights permits currently only require minimum flows of 185 cfs at Hopland and Healdsburg, and 125 cfs at Guerneville. The Agency is thus currently required by its existing water right permits to draw down storage from Lake Mendocino for no recreational, fishery, or water supply purpose. Were the Agency able to meet its instream flow requirements at Hopland rather than at the confluence of the East and West Forks, the result would be an additional 3,600 acre-feet of fall storage, even if no other action were taken. Later in the spring and summer, these accretions will decrease and ultimately disappear. Prompt action is thus necessary to accomplish these savings.

In order to meet the target minimum fall storage level of 30,000 acre-feet in Lake Mendocino, additional reductions in the applicable instream-flow requirements are necessary. To reach this fall storage target, the Agency recommends that the Petition ask the State Board to reduce the required instream flows to 75 cfs between the East Fork/West Fork confluence and the Dry Creek, Russian River confluence and to 85 cfs at Guerneville. These reduced minimum flow requirements would provide the Agency with sufficient flexibility to balance releases from both Lake Mendocino and Lake Sonoma to meet peak water supply demands, while maintaining much of the fishery and recreational benefits that the river provides. If the State Board did not act, minimum flow requirements are projected to be 150 cfs between the East Fork/West Fork confluence the Dry Creek/Russian River confluence and 125 cfs at Guerneville, and Lake Mendocino storage would continue to drop dramatically. The proposed changes would be requested for this year only.

In 2004, the State Board granted the Agency's petition to reduce the minimum instream flow requirements on a temporary basis to those applicable in a "dry" year (75 cfs in the upper Russian River, and 85 cfs at Guerneville). The resulting reduced flows did not result in any significant reduction in recreational values or fisheries during that spring and summer, and allowed for higher Lake Mendocino storage and resulting fisheries protection during the fall. In addition, staff from the Agency and the United States Geological Survey (USGS) conducted extensive water quality testing during the 2004 lower flow conditions. Those tests did not identify any significant impacts to water quality resulting from the reductions in flow. The USGS report presenting these data can be found on the internet at <http://pubs.usgs.gov/ds/ds168/>. Filing the Temporary Urgency Petition would be exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act under State CEQA Guidelines Section 15307 (Actions Taken by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of Natural Resources), Section 15308 (Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment) and Section 15301(i) (Operations of Existing Facilities).

Although reducing required instream flows is critical to conserving fall storage in Lake Mendocino this year, reducing diversions from the Russian River and its tributaries through the implementation of water conservation measures and use of recycled water is also critical to maintaining storage levels. To maximize conservation and recycled water use, the Agency Board will be requested to authorize Agency staff to take the following actions:

-
1. Request and encourage all users of water from the Russian River and its tributaries in Mendocino, Sonoma, and Marin Counties – including the Agency’s water contractors and their customers, agricultural irrigators, municipal diverters and their customers – to implement water conservation measures to reduce the amount of water diverted from the Russian River and its tributaries.
 2. Implement public outreach and media programs to encourage water conservation by individuals and businesses in the Russian River watershed.
 3. Collaborate with wastewater agencies in the region to maximize recycled water distribution to agricultural irrigators, to decrease diversions by such irrigators from the Russian River and its tributaries.
 4. Develop for Board consideration a program to implement water conservation programs for municipalities outside of the Agency’s service area that divert water from the Russian River or its tributaries.
-

Process for Considering Changes in D1610

It has become apparent in recent years that the Russian River and Dry Creek minimum instream flow requirements that were set by the State Board 21 years ago in its Decision 1610 (D1610) may no longer be appropriate. D1610 was adopted prior to the listing of three salmonid species as threatened species under the federal Endangered Species Act, and it did not specifically address the importance of fall storage in Lake Mendocino to the Chinook salmon migration. Moreover, although D1610 assumed that greater flows would always be better for fishery resources, information developed during the Agency’s Endangered Species Act Section 7 consultation suggests this may not be so, at least for the salmonid species. D1610 expressly contemplated that later fishery studies might give rise to a need to change the flows established by D1610. D1610 also expressly contemplated that flow changes might be needed in the event of a change in flows from PG&E’s Potter Valley Project into the Russian River Basin. Accordingly, in D1610, the State Water Board reserved jurisdiction to reconsider minimum streamflows as needed to respond to changed conditions and new information.

Because these D1610-contemplated changes have occurred, Agency staff will recommend that work commence on a proposal to ask the State Board to change D1610 minimum flows to account for these changes. Possible Russian River and Dry Creek flow changes were evaluated as a part of the Agency’s Section 7 consultation with NMFS and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The analysis in the Agency’s Biological Assessment determined that lower summer flows would improve habitat for the listed salmonid species, and also increase the pool of cool water available in Lake Mendocino to support the fall migration runs. Changing D1610 flows to meet these fishery objectives would aide in the conservation and recovery of the listed salmonid species.

As part of the development of D1610 flow changes, Agency staff will also recommend holding workshops this spring in Ukiah, Healdsburg, and Guerneville on May 1, 2 and 3 to discuss the possible flow changes and the importance of the flow changes to improving summer salmonid

habitat and to the preservation of fall Lake Mendocino storage levels. After the workshops, the General Manager/Chief Engineer would likely issue a Notice of Preparation for an Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement, which would evaluate the environmental impacts of the flow changes and of other measures to protect and conserve the listed salmonid species.

“These three suites of actions – promptly filing a Temporary Urgency Change Petition with the State Board, taking actions to encourage and increase water conservation to address the pending situation, and developing a proposal for changes to the D1610 flow regime and implementation of other measures to protect fishery resources – are consistent with the Agency’s long-term goal of creating a sustainable, balanced system that can meet the needs of the Agency’s water customers, the needs of recreational users of the Russian River and the needs of the listed species,” said Jeane.

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Sonoma County Water Agency provides water supply, flood protection and sanitation services for portions of Sonoma and Marin counties. Visit us at www.sonomacountywater.org.

Nor Cal water agency: Conservation is critical
Russian River could run dry, official says
Elizabeth Larson
Capital Press

SANTA ROSA - A Northern California water agency is asking water users to immediately begin conserving water due to lack of rain, less water upstream, and increasing agriculture and urban water demand.

The Sonoma County Water Agency announced April 12 that it needs to achieve conservation levels of 10 to 15 percent because of the potential for historically low water levels upstream in Lake Mendocino.

Chris Murray, the water agency's chief of water resources planning, said this is the most significant conservation effort undertaken by the agency in recent years.

He said the agency is asking for people to make lifestyle change, including driving dirtier cars and living with dirtier driveways and browner lawns.

The agency also will go the agricultural community to ask for conservation including deficit irrigation on some crops.

"We really appreciate that our agriculture partners out there already have such efficient methods of irrigation and watering."

Without conservation, Murray said, both Lake Mendocino and the Russian River could conceivably run dry.

Lake Mendocino, which Murray reports is now at 69,000 acre feet, is projected to drop to about 10,000 acre feet unless there's significant spring rainfall or a reduction in water use.

The 1976 drought was reportedly the last time Lake Mendocino was at a similar water level, Murray said.

Murray said the serious situation for Sonoma's water is a combination of the lack of rainfall and the Potter Valley Project's reduced flows.

Last fall, Pacific Gas & Electric discovered that it was releasing too much water through its Potter Valley hydroelectric project, according to spokesman David Eisenhower. That project diverts water from the Eel River and into the upper Russian River Basin, eventually reaches Lake Mendocino.

Eisenhower said that, in order to comply with its regulatory license, PG&E had to reduce flows by 33 percent, which led to concerns downstream for agricultural and municipal users alike. Those conditions, combined with rainfall levels that are at 60 percent of normal, have led to the agency's calls for conservation.

Lake Mendocino provides drinking water for an estimated 750,000 residents in portions of Mendocino, Sonoma and Marin counties, the agency reported. Water from the lake that flows into the Russian River irrigates nearly 60,000 acres of agricultural land.

Lex McCorvey, executive director of Sonoma County Farm Bureau, said the agricultural community is waiting to see how the different agencies - from federal to state to local - will address the potential crisis.

There is also some confusion about what the current water situation's ultimate impacts and ramifications will be for agriculture, McCorvey said.

"We are aware that water issues are going to become ever more prevalent and are critical to our community," McCorvey said. He pointed out that agriculture already has been very active in using alternative water sources, including tertiary treated water, private ponds and reservoirs.

Although 2002 had similarities to this year's water supplies, it also had more water to draw on, Murray said. In April 2002, Lake Mendocino had 86,000 acre feet of water, compared to the current 69,000 acre feet.

Lake Mendocino usually stays full until the first week of June. In a year with more consistent rain totals, the lake doesn't have enough time to go down to really low levels, Murray said. But that hasn't been the case this year.

"We've never seen it start dropping this early," said Murray, explaining that Lake Mendocino has fallen by between 200 and 300 acre feet per day.

Concerns about migrating and spawning of endangered Chinook salmon in the upper Russian River, said Murray, is "the heart of the issue."

The Chinook salmon run that occurs mostly between Oct. 1 and Nov. 30 needs enough water for the fish to travel. Murray said that salmon run will coincide with a critical water storage period.

"If we can get everyone across the board to do a conservation effort, it's really going to show up as water in the lake for fish," he said, noting that the agency will closely follow the fish's migration and spawning.

In July, Murray said their lake level projections will be come more accurate and they'll have a clearer picture of the difference in Lake Mendocino's level between this year and previous years.

- Friday, April 20, 2007

Elizabeth Larson is based in Lucerne. Her e-mail address is el Larson@capitalpress.com.

Water woes return

A combination of low spring rainfall levels and new regulations could cause drought conditions in Sonoma, Mendocino and Marin counties by fall

By GUY KOVNER

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

New rules and too little rain have transformed a North Coast awash in water last year to a region bracing for a dry lake, low river and hold-the-car-wash conservation measures reminiscent of the 1970s drought.

An unprecedented combination of scant rainfall and new water regulations wiped out Mother Nature's largess in 2006, when flooding did more than \$300 million in damage but also pumped up water supplies.

Now, only one dry winter later, the call is out to conserve water from Tiburon to Ukiah as water managers scramble to balance the competing needs of those who drink, swim, irrigate and inhabit Russian River water.

What happened to the old rule of thumb that it took at least two rain-stingy seasons to add up to trouble at the water tap?

A one-two punch by nature and policymakers has left Lake Mendocino, one of the region's two major reservoirs, critically low with a long, dry summer looming. And efforts to revive endangered salmon and steelhead have crimped relief from the other reservoir, Lake Sonoma, which is full to the brim.

With little hope for significant rainfall, worried water managers are appealing for relief from water flow rules that keep the Russian River ripe for canoeing all summer. If they can't get a break, managers fear Lake Mendocino could be nearly bone-dry by fall and much of the river itself may disappear.

"This is now a regional problem," said Judy Hatch, Russian River Flood Control and Water Conservation Improvement District president. "I think it's everybody's problem."

Water managers called on the 750,000 residents of Sonoma, Mendocino and Marin counties last month to voluntarily cut water use by 10 percent to 15 percent, and will soon boost that request to 20 percent, said Chris Murray, chief of water resources planning for the Sonoma County Water Agency.

Residents, farmers and businesses from Tiburon to Ukiah, even rural homes on their own wells, should save every drop they can, Murray said. "If people want to drive a dirty car for (the benefit of) salmon, I would encourage it," he said.

Sonoma County Supervisor Paul Kelley, whose district includes Lake Sonoma, calls the situation a "regulatory drought" and is pushing for bureaucratic relief.

In the absence of any regulations, both reservoirs would be full and water could flow freely to all who need it for survival, fun or profit.

Instead, water officials say they are engaged in a "balancing act," attempting to stretch a limited water supply to meet the competing needs of ranchers, city dwellers, recreational interests and fish.

The crux of the water crisis is Lake Mendocino, a reservoir north of Ukiah built in 1958 to hold about 90,000 acre-feet of water -- a year's supply for about 360,000 people.

Approaching a naturally dry summer, the reservoir is about 70 percent full, with 66,700 acre-feet of water. At this time last year, after a wet winter, Lake Mendocino held 88,680 acre-feet.

Mother Nature was generous during the winter of 2005-06, dropping 55 inches of rain on Ukiah through May 5, well above the 30-year seasonal average of 37 inches. As of Saturday, Ukiah had just 22 inches of rain this season.

Santa Rosa's 20-inch rainfall so far this season is two-thirds of the 31-inch average.

The Army Corps of Engineers keeps Lake Mendocino low by releasing water during winter to hold runoff from a major storm and control flooding, and counts on spring rains to top off the reservoir.

Until this year, Lake Mendocino had a secondary water source in the event of a dry spring. Water from the Eel River, diverted through a tunnel and a power plant at Potter Valley, would deliver as much as 160,000 acre-feet to Lake Mendocino.

But two things happened this season. A fish screen collapsed in the tunnel in December, reducing its water-carrying capacity, and in March new rules more than doubled a cutback in Eel River diversions -- from 15 percent to 33 percent.

The two factors curbed Eel River diversions to Lake Mendocino by about 50,000 acre-feet. "We would have been in good shape," Murray said, had that much water arrived from the Eel River.

Instead, the lake is already unseasonably low and is expected to shrink all summer long due to mandatory releases that maintain a recreational flow in the Russian River from Ukiah to Healdsburg.

Barring any changes in streamflow rules, Lake Mendocino will be down to a mere 8,000 acre-feet by the end of October, lower than ever and possibly too low to discharge any water into the river. The lake's record low, 12,000 acre-feet, was recorded Nov. 4, 1977, at the height of the area's two-year drought.

The Sonoma County Water Agency has asked permission to lower the river's summertime flow, a step that threatens tourism but would help sustain Lake Mendocino. The state Water Resources Control Board is expected to issue a staff ruling on the request this month, followed by a hearing later in the summer.

Meanwhile, Lake Sonoma, which opened near Healdsburg in 1983, is full with 242,000 acre-feet of water, a little less than last year at this time. "We're very proud of that reservoir," Murray said.

But Lake Sonoma's ability to provide water to the agency's 600,000 customers in northern Marin and most of Sonoma County is constrained by its mechanics. Water released from the lake travels 15 miles down Dry Creek to the Russian River, then downstream to the water agency's intake at Wohler Bridge near Forestville.

The National Marine Fisheries Service, intent on restoring the river's steelhead and salmon populations, is pushing for a cap on Dry Creek flows, reducing the allowable volume by about 40 percent.

Dry Creek is a "rearing habitat" for the endangered fish, and the government recently determined that too much water is harmful, Murray said.

A pipeline from Lake Sonoma to Wohler could circumvent the Dry Creek restriction, but county officials say it is not a perfect solution and is, at best, hundreds of millions of dollars and years away.

Kelley believes Sonoma County should get more Eel River water and wants various agencies to reconsider the 33 percent cutback.

The water agency is hoping to scale back the Russian River streamflow mandates that are slowly draining Lake Mendocino. That step, coupled with aggressive conservation, would leave 30,000 acre-feet in the reservoir at summer's end, Murray said.

Toward that end, he suggested, it's time to revive the 1970s drought-era slogan: "Shower with a friend."

You can reach Staff Writer Guy Kovner at 521-5457 or guy.kovner@pressdemocrat.com.
<http://www1.pressdemocrat.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070506/NEWS/705060357&SearchID=73280332534726>

The Sonoma County Water Agency's top 10 water reduction tips:
Ukiah Daily Journal – 5/3/07

1. Your water meter is an important conservation tool. It not only measures the amount of water you use, but can also tell you if there is a leak in your plumbing.
2. Purchase a front-load washing machine that uses 40 percent less water. Check with your local water provider for rebates.
3. Don't let water run while shaving, brushing teeth or rinsing dishes.
4. Sweep debris away from your driveway or decked areas.
5. Use a bucket and a hose with an automatic shut-off nozzle when you wash your car, or take your car to a car wash that recycles water.
6. Cover your swimming pool to cut evaporation loss. Postpone any non-essential pool repairs if they require draining and refilling of the pool.
7. Inspect your sprinkler systems. Even at a glance, sprinkler problems may be discovered.
8. Water early in the morning, avoid watering during the heat of the day when water evaporates more quickly, or when it's windy. Set automatic timers to water before 6 a.m. or after 9 p.m.
9. Defer new landscape planting until fall when planting conditions are more favorable.
10. Water your lawn in two short cycles rather than one long cycle. By splitting your watering time in half and by repeating it again about one hour later, you will reduce water runoff and water more deeply, which encourages deeper, healthier root development. It also allows the turf to go without water for longer periods of time.

http://www.ukiahdailyjournal.com/ci_5809256

Officials warn of potential drought
Palo Alto Daily News

Sierra snowpack water content falls to lowest level in 20 years

State water officials said the measured water content of snowpack in the Sierra Nevada was 71 percent below normal, the lowest it has been in 20 years.

On Tuesday the California Department of Water Resources completed its final survey for the winter months.

"This is continued bad news for the Bay Area water supply," said Tony Winnicker, spokesman for the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission. However, he said the results of Tuesday's survey were no surprise.

The water district began asking its 2.4 million customers in San Francisco, Alameda, Santa Clara and San Mateo counties in early April to begin conserving water.

The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission gets 85 percent of its water from the Sierra Nevada snowmelt, said Art Jensen, general manager for the Bay Area Water Supply and Conservation Agency.

The water is stored in the Hetch Hetchy reservoir on the Tuolumne River in Yosemite National Park.

The remaining 15 percent of the water comes from local watersheds, which also dry up during a drought, Jensen said.

Sue Sims, spokeswoman for the state Department of Water Resources, said that the Hetch Hetchy reservoir is currently full and the water supply is expected to be fine for this year, but since it is unknown if next year will be dry as well, water officials have called for voluntary conservation.

Scientists studying climate change have predicted that global warming will result in longer and deeper droughts, Sims said. By the year 2050, scientists have predicted that on average there will be 25 percent less snowpack in the Sierra Nevadas, Sims said.

The Sonoma County Water Agency has also called for voluntary conservation due to "dangerously low water supply levels" expected in Lake Mendocino this summer and fall, according to agency spokesman Brad Sherwood.

The Contra Costa Water District, serving 550,000 customers in central and eastern Contra Costa County, wants its customers to conserve water as well, but is not affected by the Sierra Nevada snowpack water shortage, Patty Friesen, public affairs director for the district, said.

The Contra Costa Water District gets 100 percent of its water from the San Francisco-San Joaquin Delta, Friesen said. Water that feeds the delta is stored in the Shasta Reservoir in Shasta County, and, according to Friesen, that reservoir is currently full.

Santa Cruz residents, on the other hand, began mandatory water rationing on Tuesday and are prohibited from watering their lawns and gardens between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m.

Santa Cruz's water system is different from other city water systems in that it is 98 percent dependent on surface water sources such as the San Lorenzo River, Loch Lomond Reservoir and other streams in the North Coast area.

Some 75 percent of the city's water comes from streams and rivers, with another 20 percent coming from Loch Lomond Reservoir.

Loch Lomond Reservoir right now is nearly full at 98 percent, but it only holds half a year's supply of water for the city, and rain has not been falling as summer approaches, according to the water district.

The other big problem is that without the rain, the streams and San Lorenzo River are running very low.

One of the easiest ways to reduce water consumption is to replace old appliances, such as toilets and washing machines, with water-efficient appliances, Winnicker said.

Sims said that people also use a tremendous amount of water on outdoor landscaping. They can reduce water use by watering in the evenings instead of in the heat of the day and by planting types of plants that don't require as much water.

People are also asked to fix leaks, make sure their toilets aren't running, which means they're leaking, take shorter showers and turn off the water when they are brushing their teeth.

Running full dishwasher or washing machine loads rather than partial loads can help cut back on water use as well, Sims said.

Dwindling water supply requires paradigm shift
Editorial
Windsor Times

A pair of public meetings held this week illustrate the increasing importance of water in Sonoma County and the political, economic and environmental pressures that are at play in the struggle over the county's limited and dwindling water supplies.

The Sonoma County Water Agency (SCWA), which controls the tap for 600,000 customers in Sonoma and Marin, is between a rock and muddy, soft place. A dry year and reduced diversions from the Eel River threaten to lower Lake Mendocino to unprecedented levels. Because the agency is required to maintain minimum flows in the river below the lake, they estimate that by November they might not be able to release any water.

Tuesday morning the SCWA asked its board of directors (the Board of Supervisors) to petition the state to lower the flows in the Russian River in order to maintain enough water upstream in Lake Mendocino to continue flows through the summer and into the fall, when the endangered Chinook salmon start their upstream migration.

On Monday of this week, the Alexander Valley Association hosted a forum on wastewater to give its members information about two wastewater projects that would pipe billions of gallons of wastewater for storage, discharge and agricultural reuse. The SCWA is proposing a large project to distribute wastewater to farmers, and thereby save water that would otherwise be pumped from the Russian River or its aquifer. Winegrowers are stuck in their own dilemma - do they accept the wastewater and its many unknowns or turn it down at the risk of not having any water to irrigate their crops in the future?

The SCWA is also under pressure from the federal government to protect the endangered fish in the river and must carefully coordinate flows to protect their habitat and migration.

And last, but far from least, the Water Agency must prove to water regulators that it is doing everything in its power to conserve the water supply before it is entitled to divert another 35,000 acre feet of water from Lake Sonoma to sell to its customers, the growing cities of Sonoma County.

It is clear that the Russian River system is stretched to its limits, or very close. In a year that has been dry, but far from a drought, we are experiencing drought-like supply conditions and calls for conservation and possible restrictions. What might this scenario be in back-to-back dry years, or three consecutive dry years?

As part of Tuesday's vote to attempt to lower flows in the river, the SCWA also will "request and encourage" water users to conserve water. Several speakers suggested that mandatory conservation be implemented; some going so far as to say there should be a ban on watering lawns. That may be a drastic action at this point, and probably unlikely,

but decorative landscaping in urban areas that consume large quantities of water are certainly a lower priority than the Russian River's fisheries, domestic consumption and the water demands for the thousands of acres of crops in the river's watershed.

Water conservation must take on more immediacy. We can no longer take our water supply, or the Russian River, for granted. It must be treated with the respect it is due as an invaluable resource that we cannot live without.

- Barry W. Dugan

Low flow
Editorial
The Press Democrat 4/29/07

Sonoma County Water Agency plan is necessary -- but not enough
The Sonoma County Water Agency has no choice but to move forward with a proposal that will allow it to reduce the amount of water flowing into the Russian River during summer months.

By taking less water from Lake Mendocino and Lake Sonoma, the agency hopes to have enough water stored to increase river flows in the fall when fish begin their upstream journey to spawning grounds. Storing water now will ensure that there is water available to meet residential demands, too.

If the rains come early, the whole exercise will be in vain -- but the agency can't risk betting on an early, wet autumn.

The fact that the proposal is necessary doesn't make it good. If approved by the state water board, it will mean less water for farmers this summer -- especially those between Ukiah and the Dry Creek Valley. It would also be a major economic blow to people who depend on river-related tourism for their livelihood.

Then there is the fact that drastic cuts in river flow might not be necessary if the water agency required cities to impose mandatory rationing upon customers, instead of relying on voluntary reductions.

Farmers and people living on the lower Russian River are naturally angry about a plan that requires them to change their lives, while 600,000 urban users are being asked to cut their consumption.

It is increasingly evident that conservation can no longer be an emergency response during a dry year: to reduce pressure on the river and to help replenish aquifers, people need to use less water even during rainy years.

So, at the same time the water agency is asking the state for approval to cut river flows, it needs to ensure that residents do their share by reducing per capita consumption -- permanently.

Sonoma County is blessed to have a river as beautiful and plentiful as the Russian. It will require compromises by everyone to keep it that way.

<http://www1.pressdemocrat.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070429/NEWS/704290372&SearchID=73279630712812>

Dry year, red tape may lower flows in river
Lake Mendocino could reach lowest levels ever unless state approves Water Agency petition

By Barry W. Dugan
The Healdsburg Tribune

Citing the prospect of a nearly empty Lake Mendocino and a dry Russian River by late fall, the Board of Supervisors voted this week to petition state water officials to allow lower flows in the river this summer, a move they say is critical to preserve water supplies and protect the endangered chinook salmon migration in the fall.

"The reality is that we have to act quickly to preserve the water in the lake," said Fourth District Supervisor Paul Kelley during Tuesday's meeting. By petitioning for a low-flow regime, "we can have the recreational uses, municipal supplies and ag uses ... otherwise we could be seeing a disaster for the chinook."

A combination of a dry rain year and drastically reduced water diversions from the Eel River have prompted Sonoma County Water Agency officials to forecast that Lake Mendocino will be drawn down to 8,000 acre feet of water by November - the lowest level ever. During the drought of 1976-77 the lake held 12,000 acre feet.

While flows from the Eel River diversion have been cut in half, due to federal restrictions imposed on PG&E's Potter Valley hydroelectric plant, the SCWA is required to maintain minimum flows in the Russian River between Lake Mendocino and Dry Creek. Fifth District Supervisor Mike Reilly also blamed a miscalculation by PG&E of a federal ruling for the reduced flows.

"PG&E was 100 percent off in their estimates in terms of diversions and that has made a huge difference in terms of our water supply," said Reilly, who rallied support to negotiate with PG&E and federal energy regulators to reconsider the cut in diversions from the Eel River.

Supervisors on Tuesday, acting in their role as SCWA directors, voted unanimously to petition the State Water Resources Control Board to reduce minimum flows in the river, with the goal of having 30,000 acre feet of water in Lake Mendocino by late September. The county will ask for minimum flows from Lake Mendocino to Dry Creek to be reduced from 185 cubic feet per second to 75 cfs and the minimum flows in the lower river from Dry Creek to Guerneville to go from 125 to 85 cfs.

The SCWA was granted a similar request in 2004 and officials say the lower flows did not affect recreation or fisheries on the river during that summer.

During a public hearing on the item Tuesday morning, elected officials from Sonoma and Mendocino urged supervisors to approve the request for lower flows to protect municipal supplies and provide water for agriculture. Other members of the public called for even

greater conservation measures - some telling the board that mandatory restrictions should be imposed on the SCWA's urban customers.

Vesta Copestakes, a Forestville resident, asked supervisors to “take conservation to the next step” and mandate water restrictions, suggesting that watering of lawns be prohibited. “Could we mandate no lawns?” she said. “Because it is a complete waste of water ... it will look ugly for awhile but people will adapt and relandscape.”

Healdsburg resident Don McEnhill, who directs the Russian Riverkeeper program, disagreed with the SCWA's assessment of the effect of reduced river flows in 2004. “We saw it differently,” he said, with canoeists having to drag canoes “over every riffle,” and the Sonoma County Sheriff's Department being unable to operate its patrol boat in the lower river.

He said the agency could achieve the savings by actively encouraging conservation, unlike 2004 “when there was very little actual conservation.”

“Everyone along the river must be encouraged to reduce water use,” he said. McEnhill also joined in the call for mandatory restrictions. “We would like to see mandatory restrictions and conservation plans ... it would be a tragedy to see green lawns in Santa Rosa while the lower river stagnates ... and people have to drag canoes” over shallow stretches.

Jim Maresca, the former head of the Russian River Chamber of Commerce and a member of the Russian River Advocates, said reduced flows could harm the lower river's tourist economy, which is still recovering from the New Year's flood of 2005-06. He said responsibility for water conservation should be shared, asking supervisors to “develop methods for conservation enforcement,” including a prohibition on watering of lawns.

Not only will recreation and the economy of the lower river suffer from the low flows, but domestic users will as well. Chuck Howell, the general manager of the Sweetwater Springs Water District, said that the agency's 10,000 customers rely directly on water pumped from the Russian River aquifer. “If the aquifer begins to drop, we have virtually no water supply for 10,000 people,” said Howell. He asked supervisors to “help us manage our resources in the aquifer ... we lack the resources to conduct the studies to understand fully the recharge of the aquifer.”

Russian River Watershed Protection Committee director Brenda Adelman asked supervisors to look at the “big picture,” and suggested that one factor that hadn't been considered was the reduction of the Russian River aquifer by gravel mining, a failure to manage the county's groundwater resources, and no enforcement of water permits. “This river is being operated like a plumbing system ... not like a natural river system,” she said.

Adelman said that officials were not considering that lowering flows would increase toxicity in the river from such things as irrigation runoff, which “causes harm to fish and causes harm to people.”

She called it “ironic” that Santa Rosa officials were not in attendance, and “just last week they asked for an increase in their water allocation.”

Before a final vote, which was 4-0 with Supervisor Tim Smith absent, Reilly said the county should consider new green building standard that would conserve energy and water, including gray water systems and stricter regulation of well permits along the Russian River.

Reilly also asked water agency officials to monitor early conservation efforts and “see if we are making the mark” on reducing usage.”

The board vote to petition for lower flows applies to this year only, but SCWA staff will return May 15 with a request to permanently amend the flow regime, outlined in the state Decision 1610, which is now 22 years old.

<http://www.sonomawest.com/articles/2007/04/26/healdsburg/news/news4.txt>

County seeks river flow cut

Plan could affect farmers, recreation along Russian River during summer

By BLEYS W. ROSE

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Facing threats of water shortages, Sonoma County wants to cut the summer flow of the Russian River and to keep more water in reservoirs to help spawning salmon thrive in the fall.

But the push to store more water would cut the amount of water available to farmers and could affect recreation along the river during the summer.

The county Water Agency's request to the state Water Resources Control Board sets up a rerun of 2004 and 2002 when similar cuts touched off bitter debates among urban water users, environmentalists, river advocates and slow-growth activists.

Water Agency officials told county supervisors Tuesday that trimming river flow now would result in more water in Lake Mendocino and Lake Sonoma in time for September and October, when salmon need a healthy river flow to swim upriver and spawn.

They said immediate action is necessary because little rain fell this winter and the state has cut how much water is allowed out of the Potter Valley project that feeds the Russian River.

"We are starting the year at much lower levels than those bad years," said Chris Murray, Water Agency engineer. "We could have 8,000 acre feet in Lake Mendocino in September, which is less than the worst drought of 1976-77. We are not sure if we can physically pump water out at that level."

The agency will ask the state board for permission to cut the flow along the river south of Lake Mendocino from 185 cubic feet a second to 75 and the flow out of Lake Sonoma, as measured at Guerneville, from 125 cubic feet a second to 85.

The state board is expected to hold hearings on the request in early summer.

Representatives of river businesses, particularly in the tourism industry, said their livelihoods would be harmed if river flow is cut so much that tourists are scared away.

Jim Maresca, representing the Russian River Advocates group, said area residents and businesses still were reeling from effects of the New Year's weekend flood of 2006. In 2004, some of the loudest protests to reducing flows came from river businesses, such as canoe rentals and resorts.

"The lower Russian River is in tough shape," Maresca said. "It is not in a position to sustain a drop in its economy."

Bob Anderson, executive director of the United Winegrowers of Sonoma County, said vineyard operators that depend on Dry Creek are likely to support reduced flows if it means consistent supply during the summer.

“My sense is that maintaining flow to the big aquifer along the river is most important,” he said. “It is less of a river, but there is still a river.”

On a 4-0 vote, the supervisors voted to support the Water Agency’s pursuit of flow reductions. But they also said they want agency officials to start talks with PG&E about getting federal approval to increase water allowed out of the Potter Valley project.

Last February, Sonoma and Mendocino officials were told federal regulators were reducing diversions out of the PG&E-operated Potter Valley project by 15 percent annually because of miscalculations of available water.

Supervisor Paul Kelley characterized the situation as partly “a regulatory-generated water shortage” that would leave “a mudflat in Lake Mendocino and nothing flowing in the Russian River.”

Dick Butler, supervisor of the Santa Rosa office of the National Marine Fisheries Service, said his agency and the state Department of Fish and Game would support reduced flows but probably not quite as low as the Water Agency wants. Some species of fish may require more water to thrive, Butler said.

The Water Agency provides water to 600,000 customers in northern Marin County and almost all of Sonoma County, except people with private wells and residents of Healdsburg, Cloverdale and Sebastopol.

During Tuesday’s hearing before the Board of Supervisors, several activists in river, conservation and environmental groups called for more drastic action that they said should include mandatory conservation measures in urban areas.

They want agency officials to force cities to halt watering of lawns, which officials have identified as the major water waster.

“We felt slighted in 2004. There was very little water conservation even though there was a lot of talk about it,” said Don McEnhill of Russian River Keeper. “Mandatory water (conservation) plans should be called for.”

Agency officials have, so far, maintained that voluntary conservation should be adequate to avoid mandatory measures that would require officials in cities to order halts to lawn and garden watering, car washing and nonessential water use. Two weeks ago, they asked water users to cut use by 10 percent to 15 percent.

You can reach Staff Writer Bleys W. Rose at 521-5431 or bleys.rose@pressdemocrat.com.

<http://www1.pressdemocrat.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070425/NEWS/70425001/1033/NEWS01>

Water woes worsen
By Sandi Hansen
Sonoma Index-Tribune

Reducing flows in the Russian River this summer may be necessary to save enough water for Chinook salmon to spawn this fall.

That's the critical decision before the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors today, and it's a decision that could determine whether returning salmon, included on the federal "threatened" species list, will have enough cool water to survive their journey up river.

Of course, more water for fish may mean less water for humans.

The supervisors, who act as the Sonoma County Water Agency board of directors, are being asked to approve a resolution allowing the water agency to petition the state for a Temporary Urgency Change in the agency's water-right permits with the state. If approved by the county board, the request would be filed with the State Water Resources Control board and, if allowed, would seek lower minimum flows in the Russian River.

Water released from Lake Mendocino feeds into the Russian River and is a major source of water supply for some 750,000 residents of Sonoma, Mendocino and parts of Marin counties. According to Brad Sherwood, spokesperson for the water agency, conditions in the current water year are less favorable than conditions in 2004 and 2002, when Lake Mendocino storage levels declined to extremely low levels. If no significant rainfall occurs soon, the agency predicts that storage in Lake Mendocino will decline to dangerous levels - 14,000 acre-feet - just at the beginning of fall Chinook migration, and much lower - 8,000 acre-feet - by fall's end.

"The agency is seeking direction from its board of directors to take a proactive role in making sure there is enough water in the Russian River when Chinook salmon begin migrating this fall," said Pam Jeane, SCWA deputy chief engineer of operations. "Our goal is to have 30,000 acre-feet of (water) storage in Lake Mendocino at the beginning of the fall Chinook migration season," Jeane added.

In order to meet the storage goal, the water agency predicts an additional 16,000 acre-feet must be saved from storage releases this spring and summer. The agency maintains that it is imperative to reduce releases from Lake Mendocino as soon as possible, which is something the State Water Resources Control Board has to approve. Without the approval the projected fall storage level in Lake Mendocino would be inadequate to support the salmonid habitat. If the level drops to 14,000 acre-feet at the early stage of migration, the volume of water would be too low and the temperature of the water too high to support the fish and experts are predicting the salmon, which are listed under the federal Endangered Species Act, could die.

The water agency continues to seek voluntary water-conservation efforts from residents, businesses and the agricultural community.

Voluntary reductions of 10 to 15 percent are currently being sought by the county, for all water users, however, according to Sherwood, "If conditions do not improve, mandatory conservation restrictions may take place."

The water agency board of directors/county supervisors will meet at 10 a.m. today, Tuesday, in the board chambers, 575 Administration Drive, Room 100A, Santa Rosa.

http://www.sonomanews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2071&Itemid=2

Marin water supplier urges voluntary conservation
Mark Prado
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(San Jose Mercury News)This winter's minimal rain prompted the Sonoma County Water Agency - which provides water to Marin - to call for immediate voluntary water conservation because of "dangerously low water supply levels" expected in Lake Mendocino this summer and fall.

Water released from the lake is critical to the drinking water supply for 600,000 residents in portions of Sonoma and Marin counties, to the habitat of threatened salmon species and for recreation at the lake and along the Russian River, said Brad Sherwood, agency spokesman.

"We are asking all our customers for between 10 and 15 percent conservation," said Pam Jeane, deputy chief engineer for the agency. "We realize we are not at the end of the rainy season, so we will analyze things again in six weeks. But we want to be proactive and get ahead of this."

The North Marin Water District - which serves Novato - gets 80 percent of its water from the Sonoma agency.

"Our board has not taken any action yet" on Sonoma's request for conservation, said Ryan Grisso, North Marin's water conservation coordinator. "But we are ready for this type of situation."

Grisso noted the district has recently enacted tiered rates, in which charges are higher for those who use more water. That is expected to cut water use.

"It's been a dry year and that's the issue," Grisso said. "We will work closely with the Sonoma County Water Agency on this."

North Marin's remaining 20 percent of supply comes from Stafford Lake in Novato, which is at 99 percent capacity, Grisso said.

The Marin Municipal Water District serves residents from San Rafael south, and gets about 25 percent of its water from the Sonoma agency.

"We are evaluating the Sonoma County Water Agency's announcement," said David Behar, Marin Municipal Water District board member. "But as we look at conserving locally, that 25 percent we get from Sonoma has a role in our plan."

This year Marin Municipal has reported 32.5 inches of rain to date, compared with an average of 48 inches.

Despite the lack of rain, the district reservoirs are at 86 percent capacity, only 4 percent below average.

"That is because of last year's heavy rains, but we will still talk about voluntary conservation measures at our next board meeting," Behar said. "These measures are things people should not be doing anyway, like watering in the middle of the day." Daytime watering was recently banned in Santa Cruz.

If there is no rain from now until summer and the temperatures heat up, there is a chance there could be rationing, but the district is not there yet, Behar said.

"More rain would be nice, but we can't control that," Behar said.

Contact Mark Prado via e-mail at mprado@marinij.com; Bay City News service contributed to this report.

Conservation may call for cooperation
By CHRIS COURSEY
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

The old bumper sticker "Save water -- shower with a friend" was funny, unless you lived through the drought of 1976-1977.

No one was laughing through that winter 30 years ago when California and the rest of the West dried up and shriveled like a plum on its way to becoming a prune.

The memories came flooding (sorry) back this week with the Sonoma County Water Agency's call for voluntary water conservation in the face of "dangerously low" levels in the Russian River water system.

Lake Mendocino, the Russian River reservoir near Ukiah that supplies water to residents of both Mendocino and Sonoma counties, is forecast to drop to 8,000 acre-feet of stored water by October. That's lower than it dropped in 1977.

"It's real scary," said Mendocino County water official Judy Hatch.

Pam Jeane, manager of Sonoma County's water distribution system, said residents need to cut back 10 to 15 percent now in order to avoid mandatory restrictions later.

All of this could change, of course, with a couple of good storms. But even though the bone-dry weather pattern has moistened up a bit of late, the likelihood of significant rainfall gets smaller with the passing of each lovely spring day.

And we get closer to 1977.

That winter three decades ago was actually the second straight rainy season without much rain. The previous year had brought only 15.71 inches of rain. Then came 1976-1977, when just 13.06 inches fell on Santa Rosa. It was -- and still is -- the driest year on record.

We're in better shape today, rain-wise. Last year, Santa Rosa recorded more than 43 inches of rain. This year, to date, we've received 17.76.

We've also got Warm Springs Dam, which today has more than 243,000 acre-feet of water stored in Lake Sonoma. That, however, is offset by the fact that there are about 200,000 more people using that water than were here 30 years ago.

And even though we have more ability to store water, we probably have less ability to conserve it. Because of our experience with droughts in the '70s, late '80s and early '90s, we aren't as wasteful with water as we once were. Therefore, we probably can't cut back as much as we once could.

By March 1, 1977 -- the day that mandatory water rationing was last imposed in Sonoma County -- water customers in Santa Rosa already had cut consumption by more than 25 percent over the previous year. Getting to the target of 30 percent wasn't much of a stretch.

It was accomplished in ways large and small, from letting lawns turn brown to flushing toilets less often ("Blush, don't flush"). New wells were drilled by private citizens and municipalities in the search for water; clouds were seeded in hopes of squeezing out more rain.

Almost no water-saving idea was too far-fetched, although no icebergs were towed from Alaska to California and "no-shave Wednesdays" were never officially mandated, as suggested by one state legislator.

As an arid spring turned into a bone-dry summer, Santa Rosa put a cap on the number of building permits it issued, and residents were ordered to limit household water use to 100 gallons a day per person.

Today, most of us can't conserve by putting bricks in the toilet tank -- we've already switched to 1.6-gallon flushers from the 4- to 7-gallon models that were prevalent in the '70s. We've installed low-flow showerheads and drought-tolerant landscaping and learned to turn off the water while we brush our teeth.

All of which means it may be harder to reduce water use by the 10 to 15 percent officials say is necessary to avoid rationing.

Unless we all cooperate, as in:

You do my back, and I'll do yours.

Contact Chris Coursey at 521-5223 or chris.coursey@pressdemocrat.com.

<http://www1.pressdemocrat.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070413/NEWS/704130361/1065/NEWS06>

Lake may be nearly empty by fall
By BEN BROWN
The Ukiah Daily Journal

Water levels in Lake Mendocino will drop to 8,000 acre feet by fall if customers do not start conserving, according to projections from the Sonoma County Water Agency.

"That's about 9 percent of capacity," said SCWA programs specialist Brad Sherwood. "It's never gotten that low."

"You will see the lake level drop much faster than in previous years," said Roland Sanford, general manager of the Mendocino County Water Agency.

The total storage of Lake Mendocino as of Wednesday was 69,208 acre/feet of water. Maximum storage is 122,500 acre/feet. Sanford said if the storage gets below 44,000 acre/feet, it will render the boat ramps unusable.

Sherwood said the SCWA is encouraging its customers to begin voluntarily conserving water.

"That's probably going to get ratcheted up as the year goes on," he said.

Sherwood said he was not sure if it will even be possible to draw water out of the lake if the level drops to 8,000 acre-feet.

Lower than average rainfall this year, combined with a decision by PG&E to reduce flows through the Potter Valley Project, which feeds into Lake Mendocino, by 33 percent, is being cited as the reason the lake level is expected to drop.

Sherwood said the reduced flows are translating into 400 acre/feet less water flowing into the lake every day.

"Those Potter Valley inflows are killing us," he said.

PG&E has said it is complying with its license as written by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

"This is the exact reason people around here who follow this are so concerned," Sanford said. Sanford said low water levels in the lake will also have an impact on fish. Low water in the fall means there will be little cold water for the Chinook Salmon that swim up the Russian River to spawn.

In addition to the reduced flows, a statewide shortage of rain has reduced the water in the lake even further. The dry year also means more water will be required for irrigation.

"It's basically going to be a two-month longer irrigation season," Sherwood said.

The announcement comes following a report from the U.S. Forest Service that snow levels and water content in the Mendocino National Forest are less than half what they normally are this time of year.

Sherwood said there is still a month left in the rain year, but added it's unlikely a late storm will move in and fill the lake.

"We're not optimistic," he said.

Ben Brown can be reached at udjbb@pacific.net.

Save water now, or lose it later

Water agency wants residents to cut use by 10 to 15 percent to avoid restrictions in summer

By BLEYS ROSE

AND MARY CALLAHAN THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

The last time Denise Adlington made a major dent in her household water use, it was largely because her daughter and her daughter's boyfriend moved out.

Adlington joked that she still has a teenage son prone to endless showers she could unload, but short of that she's pinning her hopes for water conservation on replacing her lawn and landscaping with "more water-friendly" plants.

She's already installed a more efficient water heater, low-flow faucets and toilets, and a clothes washer that uses less water than the old one.

With projections for a record-low water supply this summer, North Coast water officials hope everyone starts to think like Adlington.

Thursday, they called on 750,000 residents of Sonoma, Mendocino and Marin counties to voluntarily and immediately reduce water use by 10 percent to 15 percent in hopes of avoiding mandatory restrictions later.

Lack of rainfall and mandatory minimum flows upriver from Coyote Dam could combine to halt any pumping out of Lake Mendocino by September, according to the Sonoma County Water Agency.

"We are praying for rain at this point," said water agency deputy chief engineer Pam Jeane. "We believe that with conservation of 10 to 15 percent right now, there might not have to be a call for mandatory restrictions later."

Even some residents who've already upgraded their plumbing, landscaped with drought-tolerant plants and made other lifestyle changes said they're willing to do what's necessary -- if they can.

"We will do it," said Birgitt Jacobsen, who added she limits herself to showers every second day.

She and her husband, Finn, said their San Rafael home stands out from others in the neighborhood because of its limited, drought-tolerant landscaping.

For some, however, there are stumbling blocks -- like the "tons of roses" at Bill Passaretti's Roseland home.

"I'm not going to live without them," said Passaretti, who said he otherwise thinks about water conservation "every day" and is diligent about taking steps to use only what's needed.

Water agency officials said they're hoping education will convey the need for everyone to conserve -- both because of the shortage in supply and because of the potential environmental impacts.

"We are under a historical and unprecedented situation here, based on the projections," agency spokesman Brad Sherwood said. "We could see lake levels in Mendocino that we've never seen before."

Some fear many people will conserve only if it hits them in the pocketbook.

"There are a lot of cities here in Sonoma County that have never metered the water, and unfortunately I think for most people, if it's not costing money, I don't think a lot of them are going to change," said Kate Burroughs, who, with her husband, owns Sebastopol's Harmony Farm Supply, which specializes in drip irrigation and offers drought-tolerant plants.

Ralph Avalon, an estimator for Petaluma-based Dibble Landscaping, said the firm has a large customer base in affluent Marin County willing and able to pay for whatever water they need, and thus are unmotivated to think about landscaping for conservation.

Similarly, Santa Rosa husband and father Gonzalo Esquivel said he's tried for 15 years to impress on his wife and two daughters the need for efficient water use -- especially when it comes to showers.

"I think that as long as Daddy's paying the bills, it doesn't matter to them," he said.

Water agency officials and Sonoma County supervisors made their pitch for voluntary reductions during a news conference attended by all Bay Area network news stations at the Healdsburg Memorial Beach fish ladder Thursday.

Bay Area water officials made similar calls Wednesday, saying inadequate Sierra snowpack indicated drought conditions were likely this summer.

In Sonoma County, water agency officials said they're looking at a dire combination of little rain, low Lake Mendocino levels, state-mandated water releases into the Russian River and limits on releases from the Potter Valley Dam.

Supervisor Tim Smith said Potter Valley water releases, which heavily affect levels downriver at Lake Mendocino, have dropped from 180,000 acre-feet in 1998 to 105,000 last year.

Smith said supervisors would attempt to get relief from state-mandated flow levels but added it was more crucial to convince residents of the gravity of the water supply situation and the need for conservation.

The water agency supplies all residents of Sonoma County except those with private wells and people who live in Healdsburg, Cloverdale, Sebastopol and Forestville.

Authority for voluntary measures stems from water-sharing agreements the water agency customers signed last June. The measures are set by the California Urban Water Conservation Council (www.cuwcc.org), which represents 350 public water agencies.

Those measures include:

Curbing use of potable water for car washing.

Using lawn and plant irrigation controllers that adjust for weather conditions.

Buying high-efficiency appliances such as low-flow toilets and showerheads, front-loading clothes washers and reduced-flow faucets.

More conservation measures are available at [sonomacounty water.org](http://sonomacountywater.org).

You can reach Staff Writer Bleys Rosa at 521-5431 or bleys.rose@pressdemocrat.com, and Staff Writer Mary Callahan at 521-5249 or mary.callahan@pressdemocrat.com.

<http://www1.pressdemocrat.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070413/NEWS/704130343/1033/NEWS01>

County may face water woes
By Sandi Hansen
Index-Tribune Staff Writer

Water agency urges immediate conservation efforts

The Sonoma County Water Agency has announced projections that water sources used by portions of Sonoma, Mendocino and Marin counties are in danger of reaching historically low levels as early as the beginning of this fall if no significant rainfall comes soon and people don't start seriously conserving water usage.

According to agency officials, water levels in Lake Mendocino could drop to approximately 10,000 acre-feet, which is the level the lake reached during the 1976-77 drought. (One acre-foot equals about 325,850 gallons of water.)

Lake Mendocino plays an important role in providing drinking water to about 750,000 residents in the three counties, including Sonoma Valley. The Russian River is fed, in part, by water from the Eel River, and in turn feeds into Lake Mendocino. The Russian River is a major source of water supply that the water agency sells to water contractors including the Valley of the Moon Water District and the City of Sonoma.

The water agency wants to educate the public and agricultural community about the low water supply projections, according to Agency Director and Sonoma County Supervisor Tim Smith.

"Now is the time for everyone to step up water conservation efforts," Smith said at a news conference Thursday on Memorial Beach at the Russian River in Healdsburg.

"The projections are alarming to us," said Pam Jeane, the water agency's deputy chief engineer of operations. "We have looked at a similar type of climate year in 2002 and taken information on Lake Mendocino levels and applied it to this year using existing storage levels. Our projection is showing we could be well below what is comfortable in the fall."

"The unusually dry springs we have experienced in recent years have made it difficult to fill Lake Mendocino to capacity and may be due to global warming," said Chris Murray, the water agency's principal engineer.

Rainfall in the agency's service area is about 60 percent of normal this year. There has also been a reduction in water flows from PG&E's Potter Valley Project on the Eel River and an increased demand for water from the area's agricultural industry.

Sonoma Valley is currently faring better than the northern part of the county, according to Murray. "We have to appreciate that the agricultural community uses very little water per acre of crop grown, and that most of the agriculture being targeted is along the Russian River north to Ukiah, not so much in the southern Valley," Murray added.

Protecting the chinook salmon is also a major priority of the agency. In 2006, nearly 4,500 chinook were in the upper Russian River during the same time the current projection indicates low water levels in Lake Mendocino this year. "Due to the low level of water released in the upper Russian River, migration and spawning of the salmon will be carefully monitored to avoid any negative impacts," said Sean White, the water agency's principal environmental specialist.

Regardless of where one lives in Sonoma County or what the overall water usage has been in the past, county officials are asking everyone to make an effort to conserve between 10 and 15 percent beginning immediately. "While cutting back 15 percent may seem small, it is significant at the end of the season, and it's a lot better than having nothing left," said White.

County officials think people are generally listening more to the message of water conservation. Murray said most of the conservation measures the agency wants implemented won't drastically change people's everyday lives. "We're not asking them to change their lifestyles ... we want them to be able to flush toilets, water their lawn, wash their car ... but in changing their thinking maybe they will realize they don't need to do some particular thing."

Meanwhile, the City of Sonoma and Valley of the Moon Water District have already been asking people to conserve water for some time. Al Bandur, Sonoma public works administrator, said every summer the city asks residents to voluntarily reduce 15 percent of their water use through efficient landscaping, fixing leaks, purchasing low-flow toilets and front-load washing machines and taking advantage of free low-flow shower heads.

In its recent renovation of the Plaza duck pond, Bandur said that part of the rehabilitation program was installing recirculating water in both the City Hall fish fountain and the duck pond. "We're saving 876,000 gallons a year with these new systems," said Bandur.

He added that a typical Sonoma Valley household uses 115,000 gallons of water a year.

Valley of the Moon Water District General Manager Krishna Kumar said he thinks that people should be keeping conservation in their minds no matter what the season. "Water conservation is a prudent policy at all times." The district has a list of 30 smart ways to save on summer water bills if any customers are interested. It also has a list of five ongoing water conservation tips that will save water, money and energy immediately. Kumar added. "These ideas are painless to implement and require some minor changes to our water-use habits."

http://www.sonomanews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1868&Itemid=2



Press Release

For Immediate Release
April 12, 2007

Contact:
Brad Sherwood 707. 521.6204/Cell: 707.570.7448

Lake Mendocino Water Supply Projected to Reach Unprecedented Low Levels

***Agency seeks 10-15% reduction in water demand through
voluntary water conservation efforts***

Santa Rosa, CA – The Sonoma County Water Agency today projected that Lake Mendocino may reach historically low water supply levels as early as this September. According to the Agency, unless significant rainfall occurs this spring, or water use is reduced, water levels in Lake Mendocino will drop to about 10,000 acre-feet. The last time Lake Mendocino reached similar water levels was during the 1976 drought. Lake Mendocino water storage is currently about 69,000 acre-feet. Water storage has been falling by 200-300 acre-feet per day for the past several weeks as the Agency releases water to maintain state-required minimum streamflows. The Agency is seeking to reduce urban and agricultural water demand by 10 to 15 percent by calling on municipal customers and the agricultural community to immediately implement voluntary water conservation efforts.

Lake Mendocino water plays a significant role in providing drinking water to about 750,000 residents in portions of Mendocino, Sonoma and Marin counties, habitat for threatened Chinook salmon, and an array of recreational opportunities both in Lake Mendocino and along the Russian River.

“We are taking a proactive role in educating the public, agricultural community, and our water contractors about these low water supply projections released,” said Agency Director and Sonoma County Supervisor Tim Smith. “Now is the time for everyone to step up water conservation efforts.”

Projected Lake Mendocino water supply levels are based on the lack of rain, reduced water flows from PG&E’s Potter Valley Project, and demand from agricultural and Sonoma, Marin and Mendocino County urban water users.

Lack of Rain: Rainfall in the Agency’s service area is about sixty percent of normal this year. Although the recent showers have been refreshing, weather forecasts indicate no major storm systems approaching the region within the month. Last year’s rainfall has played a vital role in providing this year’s water supply.

“The unusually dry springs we have experienced in recent years have made it difficult to fill Lake Mendocino to capacity and may be due to global warming,” said Chris Murray, principal engineer.

Potter Valley Project Flow Reductions: Water flows into Lake Mendocino from the Potter Valley Project have been reduced by thirty-three percent this year. The Potter Valley Project diverts Eel River water through a Mendocino County powerhouse owned and operated by PG&E into the upper Russian River Basin, and is the source of most of the summer flow in the East Branch Russian River. In 2004, federal regulatory agencies ordered a new water flow regime for the Potter Valley Project. This new regime changed the minimum and maximum stream flow requirements for the East Branch Russian River.

Agricultural and Urban Water Demand: Nearly sixty thousand acres of agricultural land is irrigated with water from the upper Russian River. Agricultural irrigation normally increases as temperatures rise and dry weather holds during the summer months. Urban water demand also increases during the summer months due to outdoor watering. Combined, both agricultural and urban water demand will further strain the already low water supply from Lake Mendocino and the upper Russian River.

The Agency will immediately begin meeting with state and federal officials to address the concerns about the projection and associated risks. The Agency will also schedule public workshops in the coming months to begin the dialogue with stakeholders necessary to develop amendments to State Water Board Decision 1610. As the local sponsor for both the Warm Springs and Coyote Valley Dams, the Agency has the right to store and release water from the water supply pools of both reservoirs. The Agency must however meet minimum required flows in the Russian River set by the State Water Resources Control Board in 1986 when it issued its Decision 1610. Under Decision 1610, the Agency has been required to maintain stream flows above 185 cubic feet per second (cfs) at a gauging station near Healdsburg.

At the same time when Lake Mendocino levels are projected to hit approximately 10,000 acre-feet, Chinook salmon will begin to migrate and spawn in the upper Russian River.

“Due to the low level of water released in the upper Russian River, migration and spawning of Chinook salmon will be carefully monitored to avoid any negative impacts,” said Sean White, senior environmental specialist.

The Agency monitors fish passing at its inflatable rubber dam through two fish ladders near Wohler Bridge upstream from Guerneville on the Russian River. In 2006, about 4,500 Chinook salmon were in the upper Russian River at the same time the projection indicates low water levels in Lake Mendocino this year.

“By conserving water today, we can reduce the amount of water that is being used for watering lawns, and instead use that water for Chinook salmon that need the water to survive,” said Agency Director and Sonoma County Supervisor Paul Kelley. Water conservation tips, programs and rebates are available through local water suppliers and the Agency’s website at www.sonomacountywater.org.

About Lake Mendocino:

Lake Mendocino is located three miles northeast of the City of Ukiah and is the major feature of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Coyote Valley Dam Project. Lake Mendocino is impounded by Coyote Valley Dam, located on the East Fork of the Russian River, 0.8 mile upstream of the East Fork Russian River's confluence with the Russian River. Coyote Valley Dam is a rolled earth embankment. Lake Mendocino began storing water in 1959.

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Sonoma County Water Agency provides water supply, flood protection and sanitation services for portions of Sonoma and Marin counties. Visit us at www.sonomacountywater.org.

Mandatory restrictions: Water agencies say imposed summer cutbacks possible
By Wyatt Buchanan and Christopher Heredia, staff writers
San Francisco Chronicle – 4/12/07

More than 2 million Bay Area water users could face mandatory water restrictions this summer if they do not cut back on consumption now, the head of the San Francisco Public Utility Commission said Wednesday.

The Sierra snowpack -- the major water source for people in San Francisco, parts of the Peninsula, the South Bay and southern Alameda County -- is less than half of what it should be for this time of year. As of the beginning of the month, the snow pack was at 46 percent of normal.

Additionally, precipitation at Hetch Hetchy Reservoir is at the lowest level since 1987 and at the fourth-lowest level since record-keeping started in 1919. The reservoir is the source San Francisco's water.

The water and snow levels are being measured every two weeks. Officials will look at the measurements at the end of May and make a recommendation on mandatory restrictions for San Francisco's 2.4 million users, said Susan Leal, general manager of the city's Public Utilities Commission.

Mandatory restrictions could mean reducing consumption up to 20 percent. Customers who do not comply could face fines or have their water turned off.

Calls for conservation have also been sounded in the North Bay. The Sonoma County Water Agency is asking its 750,000 users in Sonoma, Marin and Mendocino counties to cut back voluntarily.

Lake Mendocino, which supplies those users, is predicted to be at its lowest level since the 1970s by September, said Brad Sherwood, spokesman for the water agency.

"It's basically going to be a puddle in the lake," Sherwood said.

The agency is not looking at mandatory restrictions, but "if conditions maintain and we don't get any major rains the rest of the spring, then anything is a possibility," he said.

The East Bay Municipal Water District, which serves 1.3 million customers, hasn't decided whether to call for voluntary conservation. District staff members plan to announce any such measures at a meeting on April 24, said Charles Hardy, spokesman for the district.

"Until then, we'll just watch and wait," Hardy said, adding that the last time the district had mandatory rationing was 1989-1991 and before that the mid-to-late 1970s. "We know it's dry and could lead to voluntary conservation. We just don't know yet."

In the Contra Costa Water District, officials are encouraging people to conserve but not making a formal request that they do so.

"We'll be rolling out a higher level of awareness for people to be careful, because while the situation is tenable this year, if next year is dry, it could be much more serious," said Patty Friesen, spokeswoman for the district, which provides water to 550,000 customers in fast-growing eastern and central Contra Costa County.

Other water agencies in Marin and Santa Clara counties do not anticipate any need for voluntary restrictions, representatives said.

Rainfall has been below average statewide, and Southern California is especially dry, said Maury Roos, chief hydrologist with the California Department of Water Resources.

Previous years have seen above-average rainfalls, however, which can help mitigate that for agencies with large groundwater storage capacity, he said.

The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission recommends a number of water-conservation steps, including: turning off the faucet when brushing teeth or washing dishes; taking shorter showers; cleaning sidewalks with a broom and not water; washing machines only with full loads; planting drought-tolerant plants; and replacing old toilets.

The last time Bay Area residents experienced mandatory water-use restrictions was during the six-year drought that ended in 1993.

San Francisco offers rebates for purchasing water-efficient washing machines and toilets at the Web site www.sfwater.org. #

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/04/12/DROUGHT.TMP>

Dry winter produces concern about conserving Bay Area water
Associated Press – 4/11/07

The public utility that provides water to about a third of the San Francisco Bay area's population urged customers Wednesday to reduce consumption now to avoid drought limits later in the year.

Following California's fourth-driest winter on record, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission asked customers to cut their water use by 10 percent come June. The commission runs the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, which pipes water from Yosemite National Park to 2.4 million customers in San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara and Alameda counties.

"I'm nervous. We want to do what we can now and get people on track so we can avoid mandatory restrictions. We're way below normal," said General Manager Susan Leal.

While Hetch Hetchy is 75 percent full, the Sierra Nevada snowpack that feeds it stood at about 46 percent of normal and the Bay Area has received about half of the rain it would expect in an average year.

Regional water managers said that if wet weather does not arrive by the end of the year, the area might well be in for a repeat of its last drought, which ran from 1987 to 1992.

Worried about a long-term drought after the unusually dry winter, the city of Santa Cruz already has approved residential water use restrictions set to take effect May 1 that prohibit people from watering lawns during the day.

"We don't know what next winter's going to be like," said Bill Kocher, director of the Santa Cruz City Water Department. "If we did nothing this year with the horrible winter we had, I just think it would be careless."

Water managers in Sonoma County also urged customers Wednesday to decrease their water use after projections for September showed "dangerously low levels" in Lake Mendocino, a reservoir that serves about 750,000 people and feeds a river Chinook salmon use to spawn.

"We are looking at water levels that will be similar, if not worse than those we saw in 1976," said spokesman Brad Sherwood.

The Sonoma County Water Agency has not set an overall reduction target, but Sherwood said, "we are asking people to do everything they can at this point."

If San Francisco-area customers do not voluntarily conserve enough water by June, Leal said she would ask the Public Utilities Commission to approve its first mandatory curbs in 15 years.

Back then, the agency issued fines to customers who did not fix leaky faucets and imposed fees on those who used more than their allotted share of water, said spokesman Tony Winnicker.

Over the next two months, the utility's staff plans to evaluate which penalties would make most sense if the call for voluntary cuts in water use does not yield results.

"We are not in a crisis situation yet, and these requests for voluntary cutbacks are because we believe we don't need to be in a crisis this year," Winnicker said. #

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/n/a/2007/04/11/state/n083811D03.DTL&hw=water&sn=004&sc=491>

GOOD TO THE LAST DROP; Conservation tips: Although most are standard, showering with a friend still not bad idea

By Steve Rubenstein, staff writer

San Francisco Chronicle – 4/12/07

It must be serious, because the authorities say it's OK to shower with your spouse again.

Same for baths, assuming everything fits.

Rain and snow were so sporadic this winter that water could be scarce this summer. Water districts around the state have begun calling for "voluntary conservation," as if a two-person shower was an activity hard pressed for volunteers.

Unfortunately, many of the water-conservation tricks from past droughts will no longer work.

With most toilets, for example, it's no good any more to put a brick into the tank to take up space and save water. That's because modern low-flow toilets already use the minimum amount of water (1.6 gallons per flush) and using less will result in unfulfilling flushes.

Modern shower heads are low-flow, too, using 2.5 gallons per minute. Many already feature shut-off valves to allow patriotic folks to take "Navy showers" (soap up with the water off).

Older showers can be fitted with new, low-flow shower heads. At venerable Cole Fox Hardware on Fourth Street in San Francisco, low-flow shower heads were selling for \$4.99 to \$49.99. The higher priced shower heads featured "forceful, soothing droplets," otherwise known as water, and "relaxing, full-body showers," otherwise known as showers.

Of course, said hardware salesman Jon Pogorelskin, a high-flow shower can be turned low-flow with a 5-cent washer, which is good for conservation if not for the hardware trade.

Shorter showers and less-frequent showers also save water. So does reusing water, buying an on-off garden hose nozzle, running washing machines and dishwashers only when full and turning off the faucet while shaving and toothbrushing. Also good is building a backyard rainwater cistern which, Pogorelskin said, is a fancy name for an old trash barrel.

Voluntary conservation is the official term for the step before mandatory conservation, also known as rationing. On Wednesday, San Francisco water officials warned that if things get dire over the summer, rationing is possible. Water guzzlers could be fined or have their water cut off.

Some water users said they had learned from past droughts and were ready to pitch in again.

To keep his large lawn in Walnut Creek from dying, Al Sartor said he has learned to use the same water no fewer than three times.

"We reused bathwater by using our tub only -- no showers -- then siphoned the used water downstairs into the washing machine for reuse on laundry," he said. "Then we pumped the water from the washer out to the lawn."

Other water fans said they were already doing all they could. Herbert Marshall of Pleasanton said he installed a hydroponic vegetable garden after the last drought and isn't sure what else he can do.

"I could quit bathing, but my neighbors might complain," he said.

Kenneth Baird of Fremont said rationing "could mean the end of our backyard vegetable garden," and Jerry Lasky of Danville said water rationing would not do his swimming pool and his half-acre of landscaped grounds much good.

At Sloat Garden Center in San Francisco, salesman Alberto Garcilazo said the nursery was featuring a greater selection of succulents, cacti and other drought-resistant plants, in anticipation of customers seeking to thumb their green thumbs at the drought.

"Succulents and cactus can be very beautiful," Garcilazo said. "And you're going to spend less time in the garden."

The main problem with cactus is what happens when all the water comes back. Also, there are the stickers.

"You have to be careful," Garcilazo said. "No special secret. Just don't touch them."

Washing cars from the garden hose is a traditional water-waster, but washing cars at most commercial car washes isn't, because most recycle their water.

"Water's still good the second time around," said Patsy Vargas, cashier at South City Car Wash in South San Francisco, where a wash costs \$20 -- air freshener, dashboard cleaning and tire goop extra.

"We filter everything," she said. "Goes down the drain and gets processed and comes back. Same water, only brand new."

As for the double-occupancy shower, deputy operations chief Pam Jeane of the Sonoma County Water Agency said a drought is no time to be shy. The government fully approves of whatever consenting adults do to reduce consumption.

"Absolutely," she said. "Shower with a buddy. Everything helps." #

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/04/12/BAGDDP78EG1.DTL&hw=water&sn=001&sc=1000>

Water conservation urged; MENDOCINO COUNTY: Reservoir could drop to record-low level

By Glenda Anderson, staff writer
Santa Rosa Press Democrat – 4/12/07

Ukiah Valley's 31,000 residents could face a water shortage worse than the 1976-1977 drought if a combination of conservation and rainfall fails to adequately fill Lake Mendocino, water officials warn.

"It's real scary," said Judy Hatch, the Russian River Flood Control and Water Conservation Improvement District president. The agency holds Mendocino County's right to 8,000 acre-feet of Lake Mendocino water.

The lake currently holds 69,392 acre-feet and has a capacity of 117,232 acre-feet.

But water officials are predicting the lake will drop to 8,000 acre-feet by October unless use drops and more rain appears. The lake has never been that low, said Barbara Spazek, executive director of the Russian River district.

"We're looking at new territory," she said.

The dire prediction is based on current water storage in the lake and the rate of water decline between April and October in 2002, according to the Sonoma County Water Agency, which oversees water release.

In the past few years, the diversion that shunts Eel River flows into the Russian River, which feeds Lake Mendocino, has been reduced by about 30 percent in order to save threatened fish on the Eel.

The Sonoma County Water Agency's primary charge is to ensure there is enough water for Russian River fish, and a portion of that comes out of Lake Mendocino.

"We're going to go to the regulators and ask them what they want to do," said water agency engineer Chris Murray.

During the drought of 1977, the lake measured 12,122 acre-feet of water in October. There was so little water on the North Coast that year, people living in Sonoma, Mendocino and Marin counties were asked to share bath water and use it to flush their toilets.

Officials of both the Sonoma and Russian River districts are asking residents and farmers to start conserving water immediately rather than bet on rainfall.

"Conservation needs to happen," said Pam Jeane, Sonoma County Water Agency's chief engineer of operations.

She said she doesn't know if it would be physically possible to take water from the lake if it drops to 8,000 acre-feet. But water removal is not authorized at that low level, she said.

While the future looks dry, Mendocino County officials say there's still time for the outlook to change.

"We'll see. It doesn't take a lot of rain to get the tributaries flowing into Lake Mendocino," said Janet Pauli, who heads the Inland Water and Power Commission. #

<http://www1.pressdemocrat.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070412/NEWS/70412002/1033/NEWS01>

SONOMA COUNTY: Voluntary reductions urged now to avoid crisis situation later
By Bleys W. Rose, staff writer
Santa Rosa Press Democrat – 4/12/07

Alarming low levels in water reservoirs that supply 600,000 people in Sonoma and northern Marin counties are prompting county Water Agency officials to call for immediate voluntary conservation steps.

They want you to:

Limit use of tap water.

Stop watering lawns and plants unless using irrigation controllers that automatically adjust for weather conditions.

Cut out the car wash.

Buy high-efficiency appliances such as low-flow toilets and showerheads, as well as front-loading clothes washers.

California officials said this season is the fourth-driest winter on record. The Santa Rosa area has received only 61 percent of normal rainfall, while the Bay Area has received only half the rain it would expect in an average year.

Water Agency officials said Wednesday that the lack of rainfall has caused low flow levels on the Russian River and prompted concern that fish, particularly endangered salmon, may not survive.

In Santa Rosa, only 17.57 inches of rain has fallen since July 1, far below the 30-year average of 28.88 inches.

The Water Agency's warning on "dangerously low water supply levels" came the same day that the public utility providing water to a third of the Bay Area announced water consumption reduction measures aimed at avoiding drought limits later this summer.

Hetch Hetchy reservoir stands at 75 percent full, but the Sierra snowpack that feeds it is only 46 percent of normal.

Sonoma County Water Agency officials plan to detail a full package of their own water conservation measures at a news conference today at 10:30 a.m. at Healdsburg Memorial Beach. Water levels on the Russian River are low, indicating fish will have a difficult time using the ladder there to swim upstream to spawn.

"These little forecasts of rain are not going to help us," Water Agency spokesman Brad Sherwood said. "Water conservation efforts by water contractors, customers and agricultural community are required."

The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission is asking customers to cut water use by 10 percent. Its advice to Bay Area residents includes installing low-flow shower heads, using drought-tolerant plants and watering gardens at night when evaporation is slower. #

<http://www1.pressdemocrat.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070412/NEWS/70412003/1033/NEWS01>

North Bay Hit Hard By Drought Concerns By Nick Smith

Apr. 11 - Members of the Sonoma County Water Agency are looking for more than cloudy skies - they want rain and want lots of it.

Chris Murray, engineer: "This is probably the most serious water supply situation we've seen in 30 years."

The agency says that Lake Mendocino may reach historically low water supply levels as early as September. According to his projection if dry weather conditions sustain through spring, levels will drop to approximately 10,000 acre feet. Lake Mendocino's current level is 69,000, it has a capacity of almost 123,000. Water storage has been falling at rates of 300 acre feet per day and that has them seriously concerned.

Chris Murray, Engineer: "We're projecting lake levels that will be lower than what we saw during the drought of 1976 and 1977. And if it's just a little bit worse than what we are projecting it can be more serious."

The water supplied by Lake Mendocino helps play a significant role in providing drinking water to three quarters of a million people in parts of Mendocino, Sonoma and Marin Counties. Its waters are a great source of recreation but it also provides for the threatened Chinook salmon.

Sean White, Biologist: "We know that from years of study that Ukiah Valley and the area of Hopland is these fish prefer for optimal spawning habitat. And if there is no water left in that area then they can't get there and they can't complete their mission."

As deputy chief of operations, Pam says that sounding the alarm early is the best way to make everyone aware of the problem. Nearly 60,000 acres of agricultural land is irrigated with water from the Russian River and urban water demand increases during the summer months due to outdoor watering. But Hillsburg resident Craig Harrington says he's willing to step up and do his part by reducing his water usage if it will make a difference.

Craig Harrington, homeowner: "I think people tend to over water period and so I don't think it's going to be that big of a deal here in the short run."

Pam Jeane, Deputy Chief Engineer: "Everybody who's using water off the Russian River system whether they are a person in a home, a person in a business or agriculture □ they can all help to alleviate the potential situation."

Chris Murray, Engineer: "If anybody out there is skilled in a rain dance, now is the time to start dancing."

Rainfall in the area has been off and on. So it's possible that someone somewhere heard Chris's cry for help. Even so forecasters don't expect to make the storm system through this area within the next month. And the areas that needs water most need a significant amount of rainfall.

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Media Advisory

For Immediate Release
April 10, 2007

Contact:
Brad Sherwood 707. 521.6204
Cell Phone: 707.570.7448

Dangerously Low Water Supply Levels Projected *Agency to urge for immediate water conservation*

Santa Rosa, CA –The Sonoma County Water Agency (Agency) on Thursday, April 12 will hold a press conference to announce the release of a projection that indicates dangerously low water supply levels in Lake Mendocino this summer and fall. The Agency will call for the immediate implementation of voluntary water conservation efforts by its water contractors, customers and agricultural community. Impacts of the low water supply levels will be addressed, including Russian River flow levels and fishery concerns. The year-long projection is based on past and projected rainfall patterns, Russian River flow requirements, and recent agricultural and municipal water demands in the Russian River above Healdsburg. The water released from Lake Mendocino plays a significant role in providing drinking water to 600,000 residents in portions of Sonoma and Marin counties, habitat for threatened salmon species and recreation.

Who: The Sonoma County Water Agency – Speakers to include:
Agency Board of Directors Tim Smith and Paul Kelley; Pam Jeane, deputy chief engineer of operations; Chris Murray, principal engineer; Sean White, principal environmental specialist.

What: Announcement of Russian River Water Supply Projections

Date: Thursday, April 12, 2007

Time: 10:30 a.m.

Location: Healdsburg Memorial Beach – On the Russian River (near the fish ladder)
13839 Old Redwood Highway, Healdsburg, CA (directions attached)

RSVP: Contact Brad Sherwood at 707-521-6204 to verify your attendance – special parking will be provided at the site.

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Sonoma County Water Agency provides water supply, flood protection and sanitation services for portions of Sonoma and Marin counties. Visit us on the Web at www.sonomacountywater.org.

Directions to Press Conference at Healdsburg Memorial Beach

From San Francisco/Bay Area:

- 1) Take Highway 101 North towards Healdsburg
- 2) Take exit towards Healdsburg Avenue
- 3) Turn right onto Old Redwood Highway
- 4) Turn left into Healdsburg Memorial Beach

Follow the road through the parking lot to the Russian River. Parking will be available near the Russian River. The press conference will take place near the Russian River and fish ladder.

From Eureka/Northern California:

- 1) Take Highway 101 South towards Healdsburg
- 2) Take Westside Road exit toward Guerneville
- 3) Turn left onto Westside road
- 4) Stay straight to go onto Mill Street
- 5) Turn right onto Healdsburg Avenue/ Old Redwood Highway
- 6) Turn right into Healdsburg Memorial Beach

Follow the road through the parking lot to the Russian River. Parking will be available near the Russian River. The press conference will take place near the Russian River and fish ladder.

Contact:

Brad Sherwood

Programs Specialist

Sonoma County Water Agency

Phone: 707.521.6204 (office)

Cell Phone: 707.570.7448

(04-11) 11:46 PST -- The Sonoma County Water Agency is calling for immediate voluntary water conservation because of "dangerously low water supply levels" expected in Lake Mendocino this summer and fall, according to agency spokesman Brad Sherwood.

The low water level prediction is based on past and projected rainfall patterns, Russian River flow requirements and recent agricultural and municipal water demands in the Russian River above Healdsburg, Sherwood said.

Water released from the lake is critical to the drinking water supply for 600,000 residents in portions of Sonoma and Marin counties, to the habitat of threatened salmon species and for recreation at the lake and along the Russian River.

Sherwood said a 33 percent reduction in water released from the Eel River to the Russian River also is affecting the projected water shortage and that the water level will be near the bottom of the lake in September when Chinook salmon travel up the Russian River to spawn.

The call for immediate water conservation applies to contractors, customers and the agricultural community, Sherwood said.

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/baycitynews/roundup.DTL&hw=Sonoma+County+Water+Agency&sn=001&sc=1000>

Bay Area water conservation urged now to avoid restrictions later
Wyatt Buchanan, Chronicle Staff Writer
Wednesday, April 11, 2007

(04-11) 15:13 PDT SAN FRANCISCO -- More than 2 million Bay Area water users could face mandatory water restrictions this summer if they do not cut back on consumption now, the head of the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission said Wednesday.

The Sierra snowpack -- the major source of water for people in San Francisco, parts of the Peninsula, the South Bay and southern Alameda County -- is less than half of what it should be for this time of year. As of the beginning of the month, the snow pack was at 46 percent of normal.

Additionally, precipitation at Hetch Hetchy Reservoir is at the lowest level since 1987 and at the fourth lowest level in history since 1919, when records began to be recorded. The reservoir is the source San Francisco's water.

The water and snow levels are being measured every two weeks. Officials will look at the measurements at the end of May and make a recommendation on mandatory restrictions for San Francisco's 2.4 million users, said Susan Leal, general manager of the city's Public Utilities Commission.

Mandatory restrictions could mean reducing consumption by up to 20 percent. Customers who do not comply could face fines or have their water turned off.

Calls for conservation have also been sounded in the North Bay. The Sonoma County Water Agency is asking its 750,000 water users in Sonoma, Marin and Mendocino counties to cut back voluntarily.

Lake Mendocino, which supplies those users, is predicted to be at its lowest level since the 1970s by September, said Brad Sherwood, spokesman for the water agency.

"It's basically going to be a puddle in the lake," Sherwood said.

The agency is not looking at mandatory restrictions, but "if conditions maintain and we don't get any major rains the rest of the spring, then anything is a possibility," he said.

Other water agencies in Marin and Santa Clara counties do not anticipate any need for voluntary restrictions, representatives of those agencies said.

Rainfall has been below average statewide, and Southern California is especially dry, said Maury Roos, chief hydrologist with the California Department of Water Resources.

Previous years have seen above average rainfalls, however, which can help mitigate that for agencies with large groundwater storage capacity, he said.

The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission recommends a number of water-conservation steps, including: turning off the faucet when brushing teeth or washing dishes; taking shorter showers; cleaning sidewalks with a broom and not water; filling washing machines only with full loads; planting drought-tolerant plants; and replacing old toilets.

San Francisco offers rebates for purchasing water efficient washing machines and toilets at the Web site www.sfwater.org.

E-mail Wyatt Buchanan at wbuchanan@sfchronicle.com.

Dry winter produces concern about conserving Bay Area water
Associated Press
Wednesday, April 11, 2007

(04-11) 14:55 PDT San Jose, Calif. (AP) -- The public utility that provides water to about a third of the San Francisco Bay area's population urged customers Wednesday to reduce consumption now to avoid drought limits later in the year.

Following California's fourth-driest winter on record, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission asked customers to cut their water use by 10 percent come June. The commission runs the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, which pipes water from Yosemite National Park to 2.4 million customers in San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara and Alameda counties.

"I'm nervous. We want to do what we can now and get people on track so we can avoid mandatory restrictions. We're way below normal," said General Manager Susan Leal.

While Hetch Hetchy is 75 percent full, the Sierra Nevada snowpack that feeds it stood at about 46 percent of normal and the Bay Area has received about half of the rain it would expect in an average year.

Regional water managers said that if wet weather does not arrive by the end of the year, the area might well be in for a repeat of its last drought, which ran from 1987 to 1992.

Worried about a long-term drought after the unusually dry winter, the city of Santa Cruz already has approved residential water use restrictions set to take effect May 1 that prohibit people from watering lawns during the day.

"We don't know what next winter's going to be like," said Bill Kocher, director of the Santa Cruz City Water Department. "If we did nothing this year with the horrible winter we had, I just think it would be careless."

Water managers in Sonoma County also urged customers Wednesday to decrease their water use after projections for September showed "dangerously low levels" in Lake Mendocino, a reservoir that serves about 750,000 people and feeds a river Chinook salmon use to spawn.

"We are looking at water levels that will be similar, if not worse than those we saw in 1976," said spokesman Brad Sherwood.

The Sonoma County Water Agency has not set an overall reduction target, but Sherwood said, "we are asking people to do everything they can at this point."

If San Francisco-area customers do not voluntarily conserve enough water by June, Leal said she would ask the Public Utilities Commission to approve its first mandatory curbs in 15 years.

Back then, the agency issued fines to customers who did not fix leaky faucets and imposed fees on those who used more than their allotted share of water, said spokesman Tony Winnicker.

Over the next two months, the utility's staff plans to evaluate which penalties would make most sense if the call for voluntary cuts in water use does not yield results.

"We are not in a crisis situation yet, and these requests for voluntary cutbacks are because we believe we don't need to be in a crisis this year," Winnicker said.

Water agency calls for conservation
Elizabeth Larson
Capital Press Staff Writer

SANTA ROSA - A Northern California water agency is asking water users to immediately begin conserving water due to lack of rain, less water upstream, and increasing agriculture and urban water demand.

The Sonoma County Water Agency announced today that it needs to achieve conservation levels of 10 to 15 percent because of the potential for historically low water levels upstream in Lake Mendocino.

"We are taking a proactive role in educating the public, agricultural community and our water contractors about these low water supply projections released," said Tim Smith, agency director and Sonoma County supervisor. "Now is the time for everyone to step up water conservation efforts."

Lake Mendocino, which the agency reports is now at 69,000 acre feet, is projected to drop to about 10,000 acre feet unless there's significant spring rainfall or a reduction in water use.

The 1976 drought was reportedly the last time Lake Mendocino was at a similar water level, the agency reported.

Last fall, Pacific Gas & Electric discovered that it was releasing too much water through its Potter Valley hydroelectric project, according to spokesman David Eisenhower. That project diverts water from the Eel River and into the upper Russian River Basin, eventually reached Lake Mendocino.

Eisenhower said that, in order to comply with its regulatory license, PG&E had to reduce flows by 33 percent, which led to concerns downstream for agricultural and municipal users alike.

Those conditions, combined with rainfall levels that are at 60 percent of normal, has led to the agency's calls for conservation.

In recent weeks, the agency reports that water storage in Lake Mendocino has fallen by between 200 and 300 acre feet per day.

Lake Mendocino provides drinking water for an estimated 750,000 residents in portions of Mendocino, Sonoma and Marin counties. Water from the lake that flows into the Russian River irrigates nearly 60,000 acres of agricultural land.

The water supply from Lake Mendocino and the Russian River is expected to come under greater strain as the warmer summer months arrive, at about the same time as the area's

endangered Chinook salmon will begin to migrate and spawn in the upper Russian River, one of the agency's major concerns.

Sean White, Sonoma County Water Agency's senior environmental specialist, said they will monitor the salmon's migration and spawning patterns in order to avoid negative impacts on the fish.

Agency officials also reported that they will immediately begin meeting with state and federal officials to address their concerns about water, and will hold public workshops in the coming months.

A dry summer predicted
The Press Democrat

Bay Area water officials -- including those who run the Sonoma County Water Agency -- said water supplies are alarmingly low after an unusually dry winter and conservation will be necessary to make it through the summer.

That means limiting tap water use, cutting back on outdoor irrigation, letting the car stay dirty and buying high-efficiency appliances such as low-flow showerheads and toilets and front-loading washing machines.

It's a voluntary request for now, but that could change. The general manager of San Francisco's Public Utilities Commission warned that mandatory water-use restrictions could be necessary by the end of May.

-- Staff reports

Water fears
Editorial
The Press Democrat

Why even one dry year is enough to scare Californians

"One dry year does not normally constitute a drought in California, but serves as a reminder of the need to plan for droughts."

-- California Department of Water Resources, "Droughts in California"

Reassurances by state hydrologists aside, Californians are nervous. Unless there is significant rainfall by June 30, this year will be the fourth driest on record.

Normally one dry year -- especially one that follows one of the wettest years on record -- wouldn't result in panic.

But something has changed in California, and residents are no longer as sanguine as they once were about sunny winters.

Perhaps it's because they see every unusual weather event through the prism of global warming and wonder whether it's a harbinger of future disasters.

Drought is a special concern in the West: As reported recently, scientists worry that a warmer climate could create La Niña conditions that led to the "megadroughts" (two or three decades long) that occurred in California between 900 and 1400.

Perhaps it's because the state has added 6.4 million new residents since the last drought ended in 1992. Even though Californians have become more adept at conserving, that's a lot more people who will be depending on limited water supplies.

Perhaps it's because many people have already made the "easy" changes. They've installed low-flow toilets and shower heads, they've switched to drip irrigation and have installed drought-resistant plants. How else can we cut back? they wonder.

Perhaps it's because they've lost confidence in the ability of elected officials to address long-term problems.

After all, examples of government process and delay abound -- especially when it comes to water.

The Sonoma County Water Agency and the cities it serves have spent several years developing an agreement for future water supplies; it took Santa Rosa nearly two decades to study and build a wastewater project; it took three decades for Warm Springs Dam to be constructed after the idea was proposed.

So, it's no surprise that in mid-April, when water officials in Sonoma County and statewide are urging conservation, Californians are listening -- and worrying.

<http://www1.pressdemocrat.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070414/NEWS/704140319&SearchID=73278238707386>

Editorial: Making water conservation a way of life; The message from North Bay water officials to residents in Sonoma, Mendocino and Marin counties last week was clear: we must voluntarily and immediately reduce water use ...

Editorial

Petaluma Argus Courier – 4/17/17

The message from North Bay water officials to residents in Sonoma, Mendocino and Marin counties last week was clear: we must voluntarily and immediately reduce water use by 10 to 15 percent now, or face mandatory restrictions later this year.

California is on track to have the fourth driest rainy season on record. The dry winter is predicted to result in dangerously low levels in the Russian River water system that supplies water to local residents. Last year, Petaluma had received 40.19 inches of rain by this date. So far this year, we've received only 13.17 inches.

Lake Mendocino, the reservoir that supplies water to Sonoma County, is currently projected to drop to 10,000 acre-feet of stored water — the lowest level in more than 30 years. This is due to lack of rainfall, reduced water flows from PG&E's Potter Valley hydroelectric project, and continued high demand from urban and agricultural users in the North Bay.

Petaluma gets the bulk of its water from the Sonoma County Water Agency, a public entity run by county supervisors, which also supplies cities from Healdsburg to Novato using wells located deep beneath the Russian River near Forestville. The Russian River, which used to run dry in the summer months, has been kept artificially full year-round since a dam was completed in the 1920s that diverts water out of the Eel River and into the Russian River.

But due to orders from federal regulatory agencies tasked with protecting fisheries habitat, diversions from the Eel River to Lake Mendocino have been reduced by 33 percent this year so that Chinook salmon will be able to migrate and spawn in the Russian River. That will mean much less water available to Sonoma County residents.

If we don't cut back on our water use now and if we don't get some substantial late-season rainfall, mandatory restrictions will become a reality this summer.

Longtime Petaluma residents will recall that this has happened before. Thirty years ago, two consecutive dry seasons — 1975-76 and 1976-77 — resulted in the driest year on record and mandatory water restrictions were enacted. In Petaluma, this included using outdoor water hoses every other day — an odd-and-even system based on the day on the calendar and which side of town you lived on.

Yet the prospect of drought has always been a reality in California. Ongoing global climate changes promise to exacerbate the problem in coming years. There are also 13 million more people living in California today than in 1977, and Sonoma County's

population is up by about 200,000 since that time. So there are a lot more people turning on the tap than there used to be.

Unlike 1977, today water conservation practices have become much more of a way of life due to public policy. Low-flow toilets, drip irrigation systems, landscaping with drought-tolerant plants and common-sense water usage are steps that many residents have already taken.

If we are to have enough water to drink, shower, flush our toilets and water our plants and trees later this year, we all need to do more to conserve water now. Here are some suggestions by the county water agency and the city water department:

- Reduce your irrigation system run times by lowering the minutes per cycle or reducing the days per week the system turns on.
- Do not hose off your driveway or patio. Use a broom to sweep instead.
- Take your car to a car wash that recycles water.
- Wait until you have a full load of laundry or dishes before you start your washer.
- Call the city water department to schedule a free inspection to evaluate your water use and get water-saving recommendations.

Call 1-800-548-1882 to schedule a free residential survey or 778-4507 to schedule a commercial survey. The county water agency provides a similar service. Call 547-1910.

- Upgrade to a new high-efficiency clothes washer and get a rebate on qualified models.
- Tune up your irrigation system.
- Install new high-efficiency toilets. They use 20 percent less water than standard toilets. Rebates are available.
- Choose native and low-water using plants for your landscape. These plants thrive with less water.
- Cover your pool or hot tub when not in use.
- Check for and fix leaks. See the Green Team column by David Iribarne on page C7 of this issue.

Taking sensible steps to conserve water now will help us avoid having to face far more severe consequences later on. #

<http://www1.arguscourier.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070418/OPINION01/70417038&template=printart>

Water conservation urged

Water agency asking public to decrease usage 10 to 15 percent

By D. Ashley Verrill

Healdsburg Tribune

Conserve - Sonoma County Water Agency Director and Fourth District Supervisor Paul Kelley told a press conference audience last week that future Lake Mendocino water levels could be the lowest in history if water users do not make drastic conservation efforts now. SWCA is asking users to reduce their demand by 10-15 percent in the next few months. Photo by D. Ashley Verrill

Many of Sonoma County's urban water users could face mandatory water restrictions if usage is not reduced enough to compensate for projected water levels in Lake Mendocino, which officials say have been falling at a rate of at least 200 acre feet per day and could reach all-time lows by late fall.

The city of Healdsburg, however, has its own water rights on the Russian River, so residents in the city would not be affected by the mandates. Lower flows in the river could still affect the amount of available water, since the city has wells that draw from the underflow of the Russian River.

"Luckily for us, someone had the foresight to get the water rights in the '50s, so when push comes to shove we have priority for water," said the city of Healdsburg's senior engineer for public works, Jim Flugum.

Flugum said even though this is true, it is still important that water conservation efforts extend to this area, and the city will likely send out information mailers in May. During the summer, Healdsburg also uses its municipal water wells along Dry Creek.

Last week, the Sonoma County Water Agency staged a press conference along side the fish ladder below Healdsburg's Veterans Memorial Beach.

"This is the lowest we (will have ever) seen Lake Mendocino," Fourth District Supervisor and Sonoma County Water Agency Director Paul Kelley said at the press conference. "Even during the 1976 drought."

The agency is asking water users to voluntarily decrease their usage by 10 to 15 percent in order to avoid mandatory restrictions in the future, but current projections for early fall put Lake Mendocino at approximately 11 percent of its 69,000 acre-feet capacity. Releases from the Ukiah reservoir determine the Russian River's flows between Lake Mendocino and the confluence with Dry Creek.

"If you can imagine driving down a dirt road that is what the river will be," said the agency's Chief of Water Resources Planning Unit, Chris Murray. "We literally cannot release water from the lake at that level."

Ironically, Murray said this year was considered a normal rain year because the state bases the calculation on inflows to Lake Pillsbury, which feeds into Lake Mendocino.

Lake Mendocino levels more accurately reflect the Russian River's available supplies, however. State requirements mandate that the river flow at a rate of at least 185 cubic feet per second during a normal year, and water must be released from reservoirs to keep the flow at this rate. If the lakes do not have enough water to release both to water users and to the river flow then commercial and agricultural users will literally not receive water.

Currently, the Sonoma County Water Agency provides water to nine cities and special districts in Sonoma and Marin counties, with approximately 600,000 customers. The agency received the water rights to the Russian River system from the state when it was formed in 1949.

The Russian River originates in central Mendocino County, approximately 15 miles north of Ukiah and its main channel is 110 miles long and has five primary tributaries. Lake Pillsbury, Lake Mendocino, and Lake Sonoma were created as water reservoirs for the Russian River system, and fill based on the amount of water flowing from the Russian River, Eel River and Dry Creek watershed. In order for certain endangered species of salmon and trout to spawn, the flow must remain at a certain level during the early fall months, and officials are worried this the fish may have no where to go.

“We could lose an entire generation of chinook salmon if they do not have a successful migration and spawning period,” said the agency's senior environmental specialist Sean White. “Unfortunately this time period is exactly the same we have projected the lake to be at its lowest.”

Last year, the agency counted approximately 4,500 chinook salmon near the Wohler Bridge on the Russian River during spawning season.

Most of the stream flow in the Russian River during the summer is provided by water diverted from the Eel River as part of the PG&E Potter Valley Project, but this year's flows will be reduced by 33 percent because of federal regulations that were changed in 2004 to protect the Eel Russian River fisheries.

“We are already halfway through the rainy season and it looks like we are not getting anymore rain. It will be creepy,” Murray said. “Like a sandy plain with a wet spot in the middle.”

Besides the new federal regulations on the Potter Valley Project and a dry rainy season, nearly 60,000 acres of agricultural land in Sonoma and Mendocino counties are irrigated with water from the upper Russian River, and the demand will only increase though the summer.

The agency is attempting to have the flow requirements changed at the state and federal level, but they may not be able to make the change before it is too late.

“We really want to avoid mandatory restrictions, but we just might have to if we don't see a significant change,” said the agency's spokesperson, Brad Sherwood.

Some ways to conserve water include things as simple as checking your water meter to see if you have leaks or sweeping debris away from your driveway or decks instead of using a hose.

The water agency also recommends that you delay new planting projects and irrigate in two short cycles rather than one long one to decrease run-off. Some cities offer incentives for purchasing high-efficiency toilets, washers, showerheads and dishwashers.

For a list of special water-saving programs and water-saving tools, see the agency's Web site at www.scwa.ca.gov.

State OKs lower flow for Russian River

Water board's decision expected to keep Lake Mendocino from nearly drying up by October

By GUY KOVNER

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Citing an "urgent need" to preserve the water supply in Lake Mendocino during an abnormally dry year, the state Water Resources Control Board on Wednesday approved a plan to reduce the summertime flows in the Russian River.

Without lowered river flows, the Sonoma County Water Agency had warned that Lake Mendocino, one of the North Coast's two major reservoirs, would drop so low by fall that it might not be able to discharge any water into the river, jeopardizing water supplies, recreation and endangered fish.

The reservoir near Ukiah, now only 70 percent full, could run nearly bone dry by October, officials said, well below its all-time low mark of 12,000 acre feet, set in 1977 at the peak of the region's two-year drought.

With the lowered river flows, Lake Mendocino should still hold 22,000 acre feet in October, the Water Agency said.

The reservoir was built to hold about 90,000 acre-feet, a year's supply of water for about 360,000 people.

Scant spring rainfall and new limits on the amount of water diverted from the Eel River into Lake Mendocino combined to lower the lake's level at the start of a long, dry summer, officials said.

Seeking relief, the Water Agency — which provides water to 600,000 customers in Sonoma and Marin counties — asked the state board for permission to lower the mandatory flows in the river, in turn allowing more water to stay behind Coyote Dam.

The National Marine Fisheries Service and the state Department of Fish and Game supported the county's request, both citing the need for sufficient cool water from Lake Mendocino to support the Chinook salmon fall migration in the river.

Lower summertime flows will enable the water agency to "bank" water in Lake Mendocino for the fall fish run, the fisheries service said in a letter.

Wednesday's order allows the water agency to:

Reduce the flow in the river above Healdsburg from 185 cubic feet per second to 75 cfs. One cubic foot is about 7.5 gallons.

Reduce the flow downstream from Healdsburg from 125 cfs to 85 cfs.

The lower flows “may impair instream beneficial uses, including recreation,” the state board said in its decision.

But it concluded that the impairment is “not unreasonable considering the potential impacts to fisheries, water supply and recreation in Lake Mendocino” if the lower flows were not allowed.

Sonoma County officials could not immediately be reached for comment on the ruling Wednesday.

You can reach Staff Writer Guy Kovner at 521-5457 or guy.kovner@pressdemocrat.com.

<http://www1.pressdemocrat.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070510/NEWS/70510004&SearchID=73281031225866>

State OKs reducing water flows into Russian River
Elizabeth Larson
Capital Press

SANTA ROSA, Calif. - The Sonoma County Water Agency received approval from the State Water Resources Control Board on Wednesday to temporarily reduce water flow from Lake Mendocino into the Russian River.

The water agency sought the change based on low storage levels in Lake Mendocino that it believes could harm migrating chinook salmon this fall, and cause shortages in local agricultural and urban supplies.

The State Board approved reductions in the minimum instream flow required upstream from Healdsburg from 185 cubic feet per second to 75 cfs, the agency reported. Required flow downstream of Healdsburg was reduced from 125 cfs to 85 cfs.

Flow rates in the upper Russian River upstream from the City of Healdsburg will be maintained at rates above 125 cubic feet per second through May and 75 cfs after June 1, the agency reported. The flow rates in the lower river near the town of Guerneville will be managed to achieve flows above 85 cfs.

On Thursday, the agency began phasing in the flow reductions, which it reported will take place over the next three weeks, said programs specialist Brad Sherwood.

The Water Agency submitted an urgent request to reduce flow rates to the State Board on April 26 based on projections indicating critically low water levels in Lake Mendocino this fall at the time of the annual chinook salmon migration, according to an agency statement.

Water levels in Lake Mendocino are predicted to drop to levels lower than 10,000 acre-feet, which the agency reported would be the lowest levels recorded since the lake was first opened in 1959.

Holding back water now, said Sherwood, would allow the agency to release more in the fall, when 4,500 chinook salmon will begin their breeding migration up the Russian River.

Sherwood said the agency is still asking its agricultural and urban customers alike to voluntarily work to achieve 10- to 15-percent conservation levels.

On May 15, the agency will hold a public meeting in Santa Rosa to discuss revisiting a 20-year-old law that requires certain minimum flows into the Russian River.

With less water coming into Lake Mendocino through Pacific Gas & Electric's Potter Valley Project and climate change issues leading to extreme dry springs, Sherwood said

the agency would like to see those flow requirements reflect "today's climate and regulatory environment."

Elizabeth Larson is based in Lucerne. Her e-mail address is el Larson@capitalpress.com.
<http://www.capitalpress.info/main.asp?SectionID=94&SubSectionID=801&ArticleID=32272&TM=75731.16>

Dry Year Forces Reduced Flows in Russian River
By: State Water Resources Control Board
5/10/07

Because of the unusually low rainfall in the watershed and at the request of the local water agency, the State Water Resources Control Board's Division of Water Rights has approved a request to reduce the flow of water in the Russian River. It has also scheduled a June 5 workshop so that residents and interest groups can give Water Board members their feedback on this issue.

The reduced flow will reserve additional water in Lake Mendocino later into the year to enable residents to make it through the dry summer and to conserve water for endangered fish. The National Marine Fisheries Service and the California Department of Fish and Game concur that this action is needed to help protect the Russian River fishery. Environmental groups also support this year's lower flow limits. It is expected that there will be minimal impact on river recreation.

Specifically, the order signed Thursday states that, "instream flow requirements for the Upper Russian River (from its confluence with the East Fork of the Russian River to its confluence with Dry Creek) be reduced from 185 cubic feet per second (cfs) to 75 cfs, and the requirements for the lower Russian River (downstream of its confluence with Dry Creek) be reduced from 125 cfs to 85 cfs." Reductions will begin now and the lower flows will be in place by June 1. The Sonoma County Water Agency (SCWA) petition, in effect, requests that minimum flows for the Russian River be established based on dry-year criteria rather than normal-year criteria as defined in State Water Board Decision 1610. The request is made to prevent storage levels in Lake Mendocino from dropping to very low levels by the end of summer. The order continues, "SCWA states such low levels could: (1) severely impact threatened or endangered Russian River fish species, (2) create serious water supply impacts in Mendocino County and in Sonoma County's Alexander Valley, and (3) harm Lake Mendocino and Russian River recreation."

Combined with other water conservation efforts already in place, SCWA believes this order will allow it to get through the dry summer. The State Water Board's Division of Water Rights will accept public comment, continue to monitor the situation in the Russian River watershed and may take additional action as the summer progresses.

In response to water shortages, other government agencies are also taking steps to ensure quality water supply including an announcement yesterday of \$200 million in state grants to local agencies for conservation projects.

http://www.yubanet.com/artman/publish/article_56688.shtml

The workshop to accept comments is scheduled for June 5, 2007 more information is available at www.waterrights.ca.gov/notices.

Low water: Who's hurt

CUTTING FLOW NOW WILL HELP FISH IN THE FALL, BUT RECREATION COULD SUFFER

By BLEYS ROSE

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Low water levels on the Russian River this summer will be good for endangered fish and thirsty water users but could be bad news for recreation and tourism businesses.

Owners of canoe rentals and riverside resorts said Thursday they fear low river levels will drive away customers.

"We depend on the tourism dollars," said Steve Jackson, owner of Guerneville's King's Sport and Tackle Shop and a member of a local recreation advisory board. "People renting kayaks and canoes will have to drag them from Guerneville to Monte Rio."

But officials in Sonoma and Mendocino counties hailed the state's decision, released late Wednesday, to slash flows so that water customers would have enough this summer and endangered salmon would have a healthy river for spawning in the fall.

"Without this action, we wouldn't have any water in the river for fish, agriculture or recreation," said county Supervisor Paul Kelley, who represents northern Sonoma County.

Sonoma County Water Agency officials said they began curtailing river flows out of Lake Mendocino near Ukiah at 8 a.m. Thursday after the decision by the state Water Resources Control Board.

The state is permitting a cut in the flow along the river upstream from Healdsburg from 185 cubic feet per second to 75 and the flow as measured downstream of Healdsburg from 125 cubic feet per second to 85.

The board staff said 2007 will be a dry year, bringing conditions that could threaten endangered fish species, reduce the water supply in Mendocino County and the Alexander Valley and harm recreation at Lake Mendocino and in the Russian River.

Without a flow cut now, Water Agency engineers estimate Lake Mendocino levels would drop below 10,000 acre-feet, which would be the lowest since the lake opened in 1959.

The state board will hold a public hearing June 5 in Sacramento on the effects of reduced flows. Information about the hearing will be posted at www.waterrights.ca.gov/notices.

Emergency rules sought

Water Agency officials said they would take another step toward tighter control of river flows on Tuesday, when they will ask Sonoma County supervisors to urge state water

regulators to change the standards for imposing emergency measures. That would allow the Water Agency to seek emergency flow reductions earlier in the year.

"Our discussion will relate to the trigger points for declaring a dry year," said Kelley, who also serves on the state's regional water advisory committee. "The criteria were drawn up in the early 1980s, and conditions are different today."

Since then, global warming has been blamed for increasing the frequency and severity of droughts; the federal government has cast a protective net over regional species of salmon and trout, involving rules that effectively govern river flows; and regulators have curbed amounts of water allowed out of the Potter Valley project that feeds Lake Mendocino.

Low river flows this summer mimic cuts made in 2004 and 2002, when similar weather conditions drew urban water users, environmentalists, river advocates and slow-growth activists into debates over water as a commodity and resource.

Laura Wilson, whose family owns Johnson's Beach and

Resort in Guerneville, said

she remembers those years because tourism businesses

were on edge. Reports of low flows discouraged patrons of restaurants and bars, inns

and events from visiting, she said.

"We are very fortunate at Johnson's Beach because we have a summer dam, but mostly everybody else here is worried about what it means for summer business," she said.

However, the flow reduction should improve Mendocino County's tourism outlook by keeping more water in Lake Mendocino, said Ukiah City Manager Candace Horsley.

Prior dry years not so bad

Sonoma County officials acknowledge reduced river flows may have some impact, but they say the experiences in 2004 and 2002 were not as bad as feared.

"There were similar conditions in other years and there was sufficient water for recreation then," Kelley said.

There also was enough water in the river for farmers to irrigate during those years, said Mendocino County farmer Tom Thomas. He said the agencies have not released enough information about the current situation to allow him to determine how bad it could get this year.

Water Agency officials said they still are asking customers to make voluntary cuts of 10 percent to 15 percent. They have asked residents to curb unnecessary water use, such as excessive lawn watering, car washing and nonessential water use.

Voluntary measures, along with reduced summer flows, should help avoid mandatory measures, they said.

The Water Agency provides water to 600,000 customers in northern Marin County, along with most of Sonoma County except residents of Healdsburg, Cloverdale, Sebastopol, owners of private wells and customers of private water systems.

Caution in Mendocino

Mendocino County officials welcomed the flow reduction, but said county residents still must conserve or face severe water shortages by fall.

"We have to push the conservation of water," said Barbara Spazek, executive director of the Russian River Flood Control and Water Conservation Improvement District. The district holds Mendocino County's right to 8,000 acre-feet of water stored in Lake Mendocino.

Its customers include Ukiah, several smaller water districts and farmers in the Ukiah Valley.

In Ukiah, there's been little sign that people are serious about conserving water. Horsley said the city has urged residents to voluntarily conserve and has met with its larger water users, including schools.

Later this month, it will send customers detailed information about the need to conserve and at least 100 tips on how to accomplish that, she said.

The city also is setting up a hot line for residents to report apparent water wasting, accidental or otherwise. If that doesn't save enough water, the city may consider mandatory conservation, Horsley said.

Staff Writer Glenda Anderson contributed to this report.

You can reach Staff Writer

Bleys W. Rose at 521-5431 or bleys.rose@pressdemocrat.com.

Russian River flow being cut
Glen Martin
San Francisco Chronicle

State water officials, responding to dry weather in the North Bay, announced Thursday that they are cutting flows into the Russian River, the primary water source for most cities and towns in Sonoma County.

The move is designed to conserve water in the river's main reservoir, Lake Mendocino, to ensure adequate water supplies for municipalities this summer and to protect endangered fish when they swim up the river later in the year, said William Rukeyser, spokesman for the state Water Resources Control Board.

The state is making the cuts at the request of the Sonoma County Water Agency, which supplies drinking water to cities and smaller water districts that serve residents and businesses.

Last week, the Sonoma water agency asked contracting water districts to cut their deliveries to customers by 15 percent, said Tim Anderson, an agency spokesman.

"We're watching to see how that progresses, and we'll evaluate the situation in June," said Anderson. "Hopefully, no other actions will be required."

The cuts should ensure that there is enough water in the reservoir for releases in the late summer and fall, when low water levels in the river can threaten fish.

Flows from the reservoir into the upper Russian River -- from its East Fork to the main stem's confluence with Dry Creek -- are being reduced from 185 cubic feet per second to 85 cubic feet per second. Flows below the Dry Creek confluence will be reduced from 125 cubic feet per second to 85 cubic feet per second.

"This action is consistent with a dry weather year," said Rukeyser. He said the move was backed by the state Department of Fish and Game, the National Marine Fisheries Service and several environmental groups, all of which are concerned about the status of the river's beleaguered salmon and steelhead.

Water officials said lower flows will have a minimal impact on summer recreational activities along the river.

The North Bay is particularly vulnerable to dry winters, because the comparatively small Russian River is the main water source for the area.

San Francisco, by contrast, has rights to large volumes of Sierra water from Hetch Hetchy Reservoir on the Tuolumne River; the East Bay and South Bay sources include the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, Hetch Hetchy and local reservoirs.

E-mail Glen Martin at glenmartin@sfgchronicle.com.

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